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THE MAJOR THEMES OF SWIFT'S SATIRIC VERSE

by

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A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and
recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance,
a thesis entitled The Major Themes of Swift's Satiric Verse,
submitted by Wolfe Kirchmeir in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

ABSTRACT

Though Swift's poems have been overshadowed by his prose they are well worth separate attention. The satiric poems may be divided into three groups. The first, consisting of satires on women, love, and marriage, is the subject of the first two chapters of this thesis. The second group comprises satires on corrupt politics and corrupt politicians, and is treated in chapters three and four. The last group, made up of satires on poets and poetry, is the subject of the last chapter.

There is a coherent and unified world-view underlying the apparent incongruity of Swift's satiric targets. This view consists of the perception of the close connection between metaphysics and evil, for a confused or false metaphysical will cause evil. There is also a correspondence between metaphysics and ethics: the illusory corresponds to evil, and the real to good. Swiftian satire always, therefore, makes an ironic contrast between the illusory and the real.

The themes of Swift's satiric poetry afford instances of a handful of thoroughly orthodox principles. Two themes in particular seem to be present in all of Swift's verse-satires. The first is that a man is personally responsible

for the evil that he does; and the second is that his evil action is always the consequence of his ignorance or of his false beliefs; that is, of some illusion.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: THE DELUSION OF BEAUTY	17
CHAPTER TWO: "THAT RIDICULOUS PASSION"	38
CHAPTER THREE: THE RELIGION OF POLITICS	54
CHAPTER FOUR: WOOD'S HALFPENCE: THE POLITICIAN IN ACTION	71
CHAPTER FIVE: THE CASE AGAINST POETRY.	82
FOOTNOTES	114
BIBLIOGRAPHY	124

INTRODUCTION

For the last hundred and fifty years, Swift's poetry has not been remarked as it deserves. True, Dr. Elrington Ball and Sir Harold Williams have paid it the attention of careful scholarship, so that we now can be fairly sure of canon and text.¹ Moreover, both Ball and Williams make fertile suggestions to the biographer and critic about the significance of Swift's verse to a thorough understanding of him as man and artist. But biographers and critics, with very few exceptions, have ignored the poetry in favor of the prose. It is in the prose that they believe to have found the essential Swift, and it is upon the prose that they base their theories of his mind and art. The poetry at best confirms the conclusions the prose affords - what little poetry is read; but most critical biographers seem almost to have forgotten that Swift wrote poetry.²

This curious neglect of Swift's poetry in favor of the prose has always obtained, for though the eighteenth century considered Swift a poet of the first rank, surpassed only by Pope, that century also thought of poetry as primarily a social grace and social amusement; it criticised Swift's verse

accordingly. Deane Swift and the Earl of Orrery, as well as friends of Swift such as Delany and Sheridan, all noted the graces of his verse as they conceived them: the elegant wit, the correct versification, the robust boldness, the exact imagery, the just taste, and so on. Dr. Johnson's opinion is an admirable summary of the eighteenth century view:

In the Poetical Works of Dr. Swift there is not much upon which the critick can exercise his powers. They are often humorous, almost always light, and have the qualities which recommend such compositions, easiness and gaiety. They are, for the most part, what their author intended. The diction is correct, the numbers are smooth, the rhymes exact. There seldom occurs a hardlabored expression, or a redundant epithet; all his verses exemplify his own definition of a good style, they consist of proper words in proper places.³

In this paragraph Johnson comments on all but one of the features that were to become the substance of the problem of Swift the poet. That missing feature the Earl of Orrery was one of the first to note, and the first to defend:

The Lady's dressing-room. . . has been universally condemned, as deficient, in point of delicacy, even to the highest degree. The best apology that can be made in its favor, is to suppose, that the author exhibited his Celia in the most hideous colours he could find, lest she might be mistaken for a goddess, when she was only a mortal. External beauty is very alluring to youth and inexperience; and Swift, by pulling off the borrowed plumes of his harpy, discovers at once a frightful bird of prey; and by making her offensive, renders her less dangerous and inviting. Such, I hope, was his design.⁴

The earl's charitable hope was by degrees converted into first the suspicion and then the certainty that such was not Swift's design. For what changed from the eighteenth to the

nineteenth centuries was not the observation of the facts about Swift's poetry, but the interpretation of those facts.

The nineteenth century did not have the easy assurance of the eighteenth in deciding what was poetry and what was not. For the eighteenth century, anything written in some kind of verse was poetry; the only problems were what kind, what degree of excellence, and what moral effects the critic discovered.⁵ But the nineteenth century was forced to make a distinction between verse and poetry; for after the romantic assertion of the primacy of the imagination, it became rather difficult to decide whether what seemed to be poetry was in fact poetry. The problem was solved by appealing to the spiritual effects of the poetry: even Wordsworth is driven to plead that "the poems in these volumes [the Lyrical Ballads] will be found distinguished at least by one mark of difference, that each of them has a worthy purpose (sic)."⁶ By the second half of the nineteenth century, poetry was expected to have the same sacramental qualities as sincere faith in a divine Being.⁷ To the nineteenth century, the eighteenth had been guilty of making verse that imitated the form of poetry, but not the spirit. Hence, Swift's verse did not contain the "easiness and gaiety" that Johnson found in it, but cruelty and malice. Its formal qualities were no longer beauties to

be appreciated and enjoyed; they were coldly intellectual counterfeits of the true beauties of true poetry. The style that Johnson had praised, however grudgingly, was damned as "nothing but his prose put into rhyme."⁸

Like its reaction to Swift the man, the nineteenth century's reaction to Swift the poet has become the common one. Not that there is much reaction: the doubt about Swift's poetic qualities has become near indifference to the poetry. Ricardo Quintana, otherwise a most lucid critic of Swift, says vaguely of Swift's verse that it is "anti-poetry."⁹ Even Herbert Davis, despite his careful definition of Swift's view of poetry as "anti-romantic, anti-heroic," draws such a sharp distinction between Pope and Swift that Swift appears in contrast to Pope as not a poet at all.¹⁰ A more significant indication of the present common attitude to Swift's verse is that in none of the current paper-bound, college-oriented "Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings" is there more than a handful of poems. These poems are always selected from the same group of eight or so pieces; and they all confirm and in no way enlarge or qualify the impression of Swift got from the prose.¹¹

The present indifference to Swift's poetry is, I suppose, part of our century's indifference to poetry in general. There is admittedly a fine show of interest made by the vast

number of articles, essays, and books on poetry and poets published every year by the university presses; but these things are read only by those who must lecture on poetry, or who wish themselves to contribute to the many books of whose making there is no end. The general public does not read poetry, does not buy poetry, and certainly does not talk about poetry. Only the work of a poet such as Robert Frost, momentarily fashionable for non-literary reasons, will sell well. What caused the general indifference to poetry is a difficult question, but I suspect a certain theory of the function of art idealised poetry out of existence and removed it from all human relevance. This theory I call the "genteel," as did Leslie Fiedler; it is the degraded and perverted remnant of the Puritan aesthetic. G.P. Moriarty in his biography of Swift, written about the turn of the century, expressed the theory to perfection. Here it is; it still operates today. Let it stand as epigraph to my discussion.

It has been well said that merits of Swift's prose form the defects of his poetry. Poetry demands sentiment and pathos; to these Swift's genius was altogether alien. Poetry, at its best, takes for its subject the more tender notes of human feeling; Swift regarded them with undisguised contempt. Poetry ignores, or, at any rate, idealises vulgar necessities and mean ideas; Swift loved to dwell on their naked reality with the intensity of a monomaniac. Poetry in its bolder flights welcomes extravagance of diction; Swift always abhorred it. Swift's poetry is thus nothing but his prose put into rhyme. . . None of the qualities of true poetry can be found. . . [Swift] denies poetry can spring from a natural aspiration

for better things. . . It may, indeed, be doubted whether Swift ever took a serious view of the power of poetry to arouse noble emotions. . . It is true Swift's verse often reaches the extreme of indignant passion. But passion, though always valuable as an index of character, can only excite real and abiding interest if aroused by an adequate cause. . . Another characteristic of the poet, love of natural scenery, is also absent from Swift's writings. . . Poetry loves to concentrate itself on acts or on emotions which ennoble human nature: love, fidelity, self-sacrifice. . . Swift deals with petty defects, and from their meanest point of view. . . For the plainer virtues he has a certain admiration. . . Swift, to parody a well-known Latin saying, touched nothing which he did not degrade.¹²

Moriarty wrote his anthem to divine poesie just before the turn of the century, but his spirit still moves in hundreds of school-anthologies of verse, and informs the criticism of thousands of lovers of literature become school-teachers.¹³

While the genteel attitude to literature may explain a general indifference to poetry, it does not fully account for the critical indifference to Swift's verse. This neglect of Swift the poet may be partly the result of the nineteenth century's failure to come to terms with Swift.¹⁴ The twentieth century so far has hardly improved on its predecessor, despite Ernest Tuveson's claims that "we are in all probability closer to Swift's ultimate meanings than was any generation before."¹⁵ For though Victorian reticence on the obscene poetry has been replaced by frank imputations of sexual neurosis to Swift; and though Thackeray's horror at the Yahoos has given way to gloomy relish at the thought that Swift is making fools of us all,

especially when we hate him; and though we no longer expect, no longer even desire, our literature to display that sweetness and light which Matthew Arnold praised as the essence of literary art; we have no more discovered the "ultimate meanings" of Swift than Gulliver discovered the error of his identification with the Yahoos. But few critics seem to suspect that their image of Swift suffers from distortion, and fewer still think of the poetry as a possible corrective lens.

Dr. Ball, who admits that his Swiftian scholarship was inspired less by a liking of Swift than by a sense of obligation to his friend Litton Falkiner, nevertheless feels bound to warn that

without knowledge of [Swift's] verse a true picture of Swift cannot be drawn. In his verse he sets forth his life as in a panorama, he shows more clearly than in his prose his peculiar turn of thought, and he reveals his character in all its phases, from its most attractive to its most repelling. Before the testimony of his verse the work of many of his biographers cannot stand.¹⁶

Dr. Ball was thinking of the biographies by John Forster, Henry Craik, Leslie Stephen, and others. But all biographies published since theirs have perpetuated, exaggerated, and added to the myths which Dr. Ball expected a knowledge of the verse to destroy. (The only apparent exception to this is Irvin Ehrenpreis' Swift, whose first volume appeared in 1962.)¹⁷

The few critics who have taken Swift's poetry as

poetry have done much to correct the distortion. Herbert Davis' essay on Swift's view (and practice) of poetry establishes that Swift's verse is necessary to the English tradition to make it complete.¹⁸ His essay on Swift's satiric technique in the verse¹⁹ is, I think, the direct inspiration of Maurice Johnson's investigation of Swift's Sin of Wit.²⁰ Ehrenpreis defends Swift against the charge of wilful obscenity in his verse,²¹ and though a defense must of necessity be a negative form of criticism, his essay has encouraged a more attentive reading of the obscene poems: J.L. Tyne has published an article on their moral purpose in which he expands a remark of Ehrenpreis' into an elegantly reasoned and convincing argument.²²

When the modern critic of Swift is neither fundamentally indifferent nor detachedly interested in Swift's poetry, he tends to be hostile. He may worry about whether the sheer negativeness of Swift's work does not disqualify it as art. (Both Herbert Read and F.R. Leavis worry about Swift's intense destructiveness, and both end by saying, uneasily and illogically, that destructiveness, if intense enough, can be art.) A less disguised form of critical hostility is the modern critic's all too common assumption that whatever interest Swift's poems have as poems is far less than their interest

as psychological documents. Both attitudes in effect deny Swift's poems any literary quality; for the apologist for negative art must assert a paradox he cannot explain, and the psychiatric critic implicitly argues that the poems are artistic failures. Davis and the others I have named with him are distinguished by the fact that they are willing to let the poetry reveal itself for what it is. They assume that Swift's poems are poems: that they contain images arranged to form a significant pattern, that this pattern is characteristic of both Swift and his age, that the imagery is determined by a particular view of the world, and that the poetry is intended to convey whatever truth Swift was capable of embodying in it. In making these assumptions (or some very like them), these critics demonstrate something further: that satire is more than an attitude, a stance, a moral purpose imposed on art. Satire is an independent form of literature, in the same sense and to the same extent that tragedy, comedy, and romance are independent forms. Part of the purpose of this thesis is to define further some features of the satiric form.

The forms of literature themselves are capable of assuming many different shapes or structures. Drama, lyric, and epic are the traditional triad. It appears that certain forms can best be articulated in some structures rather than

others. So tragedy, for example, appears most clearly, and therefore most powerfully, as drama. But any form can be given any shape: the forms of fiction are not distinguishable by the technical conventions habitually associated with them. Such associations do affect the forms power to please, but what differentiates one form from another is its philosophical framework. Each form has its own ontology, its own epistemology, and so on. Tragedy, comedy, romance, and satire differ in their conceptions of the world, in their Weltanschauung. (Myth, in the narrow sense of "the kind of story that deals with gods" should be included in the list.) The forms of literature offer radically different worlds for our contemplation.²³

The differences in the literary forms' philosophical assumptions affect two, and I dare say only two, aspects of the literary work: the imagery and the theme. The twin mask of tragedy and comedy used to symbolise the theatre is a conventionalised realisation of the difference between the two forms, for both tragedy and comedy have the same structure when made into plays: both masks are recognisably human faces. The difference is in what that structure means, and hence in how the structure affects the audience: one face weeps, the other laughs. The different effects of the tragic and comic

masks are determined by their "imagery," or that in them which corresponds to imagery in literature. Hence the form of literature is ultimately determined by imagery, for imagery embodies theme, and it is the theme that the philosophical presuppositions of the literary work become apparent. For these reasons, imagery and theme will be the twin foci of what will probably be too elliptical an argument in my discussion.

II

Since theme is a function of the imagery, any analysis of literature must begin with imagery. In Swift's case, few critics have gone beyond the imagery of the poems; more accurately, few have gone beyond the first step: description of the contents of Swift's imagery. For in all the places supposed by most critics to contain the essential Swift (as if Swift could be contained in one place), Swift deliberately makes the contents of the imagery as nauseating as he can. He rarely fails to achieve what he intended (a fact Dr. Johnson notes in his favor), and the nausea he evokes causes a quite predictable reaction against him. Huxley, I think, can be taken as a fairly typical example of both the kind of critic and the kind of reaction I mean.

After reading "Cassinus and Peter" and some similar pieces, Huxley is moved to make the following comment:

'The Queen [Huxley quotes Swift as writing to Stella] is well, but I fear she will be no long liver; for I am told she has sometimes a gout in her bowels (I hate the word bowels).' Yes, how he hated it! And not the word only -- the things too, the harmless tripes -- he loathed them with an intensity of hatred such as few men have ever been capable of. It was unbearable to him that men should go through life with guts and sweet-breads, with livers and lights, with spleens and kidneys. That human beings should have to get rid of the waste products of metabolism was for Swift a source of excruciating suffering.²⁴

Huxley continues in this vein for a few more sentences, then shifts the grounds of his attack; for that this is an attack he is making becomes clearer as one reads on.²⁵ Huxley is even more offended by what he takes to be Swift's attitude to women than by what he thinks is Swift's revulsion at digestion: [Swift's] resentment against women for being warmblooded mammals was incredibly bitter. Read (with a bottle of smelling salts handy, if you happen to be delicately stomached) 'The Lady's Dressing Room,' 'Cassinus and Peter,' 'A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed'. . .²⁶

Then Huxley quotes from the poems mentioned. He quotes accurately, but he does not summarize the poems. He quotes those lines that best support his thesis; but he does not tell the reader what the poems are about, nor does he expect the reader to read the poems for himself. Even Huxley must have seen that the poems laugh resoundingly at a certain "delicacy of stomach," that the poems condemn something other than the bowels whose name Swift hated.²⁷ Huxley is right, however, in linking the "excrementitious subject" in Swift with sexuality, for Swift also links the two. But, though Huxley could

see the humor of human sexuality, he failed to see the absurdity in the awful solemnity of the services in honor of the lord god Eros; like D.H. Lawrence, Huxley could not but believe in the saving powers of sex. Swift did see the absurdity of erotic idolatry; he also saw its obscenity, an obscenity he saw in all idolatries, not only the sexual. For to adore any merely earthly power is to be deluded by the evil one, in Swift's theology (and imagery, as we shall see). But the satiric image of the Devil always tends to obscenity; hence, the satire on evil must nauseate sooner or later.

Huxley's reactions to Swift have their reasons, and most of them occur in Huxley. But having accused Swift of obsessive preoccupation with filth, Huxley must bring in evidence to support the charges. The evidence consists mostly of fraudulent Freud:

Swift must have 'hated the word bowels' to the verge of insanity; nothing short of the most violent love or intensest loathing could possibly account for so obsessive a preoccupation with the visceral and excrementitious subject. Most of us dislike bad smells and offal; but so mildly that, unless they are actually forced on our senses, we seldom think of them. Swift hated bowels with such passionate abhorrence that he felt a perverse compulsion to bathe continually in the squelchy imaginations of them.²⁸

Thereupon Huxley, who clearly will not be a bather in the squelchy imaginations of filth, discusses extreme sensitivity and extreme lack of it, in order to resolve the paradox he has

just enunciated. In support of his argument he uses a number of remarkably squelchy, but true, examples: apparently, the use of true instances rather than invented ones is supposed to lay the reader's suspicions about what moved Huxley to discuss Swift's most disgusting poems in the first place. It assures the reader that only scientific curiosity and no compulsive preoccupation with real or imaginary filth informs Huxley's analysis of Swift's neurosis.

All that can be said in answer to Huxley's statements about Swift is that they are simply not true. He says in effect that since whatever art does, it does not nauseate, Swift's obscene poems cannot be art; they can only be expressions of Swift's own nausea at human animality. I suppose it must be granted that Swift felt an abnormal abhorrence of the human body. His language of denunciation, however satirical in intent and effect, is too strong not to have proceeded from an excessive disgust. But a careful reading of the poems Huxley refers to proves that we cannot conclude that Swift here gives vent to his aversion and abuses man's animality because it first abused his sensibilities. On the contrary, if we can conclude anything about these poems as an expression of neurosis in Swift, we can conclude only that Swift here makes a decidedly unneurotic use of his aversion. In some of the poems, he projects his sickness on others, whom he calls Cassinus or

Strephon, and laughs at them; in other poems, he uses horror at physical filth as a symbol of horror at moral filth. In externalising his abhorrence in these ways, he creates very powerful satires on human vice and folly, and so doing uses his abnormal sensibility in a most unneurotic way. For the neurotic is sick precisely because he cannot detach himself from his excessive fears and frustrations enough to laugh at them, or to use them for a disinterested purpose.

I quote Huxley at such length because his reaction, though not his intensity (few critics hate Swift as much as Huxley does), is typical of a large number of critics. The most recent such reaction is Nigel Dennis', who, himself a satirist and therefore perhaps better qualified than most to speak truth about Swift, repeats Huxley's charges and enlarges them to include an accusation of profound misanthropy.²⁹ This reaction goes back to Thackeray, who in fact no more than made explicit what many Victorians must have felt about Swift. It is the standard reaction to Swift; Will Durant, who displays an uncanny ability to distill the most commonplace liquor out of the most exotic vintages of Western history, says about Swift:

His anger at the world was an extension of his anger at himself; he knew that despite his genius he was diseased in body and soul, and he could not forgive life for having denied him health, normal organs [!], peace of mind, and advancement proportionate to his mental powers.³⁰

The error that these men make is not so much that they mis-read Swift (we all do that, more or less), it is that they piece-read him. They ignore those parts of the giant they anatomise that do not agree with their Galen of psychology; they keep only that which they can understand. What they cannot understand is, obviously, insignificant: for if one cannot read a signpost, it signifies nothing. They do not notice that the creature they have assembled of the pieces so lovingly carved from the carcass is a dwarf; they notice only that it is grotesque. Perhaps the giant too is grotesque, if for no other reason than that he is huge, and all huge things are monstrous. But before we decide that, let us read the poems.

CHAPTER ONE: THE DELUSION OF BEAUTY

I

A preliminary survey of Swift's satiric poems suggests three categories: satires on women, love and marriage; satires on politics, power, and money; and satires on poets and poetry. These three categories form a useful schema for discussion, which I will follow in my argument. The categories permit reasonably unambiguous classification of the poems, and they also, but more importantly, suggest a set of logically related reasons for Swift's attack on what at first glance seems an arbitrarily chosen group of targets: women, politicians, and poetry. If we note that in the first category the satire focuses upon private vice and folly; in the second on the public effects thereof; and in the third, on a means whereby men are confirmed and encouraged in their folly and vice, then Swift's set of targets no longer represents an arbitrary choice dependent only on personal caprice. On the contrary, Swift's choice of targets proceeds from a highly coherent and unified view of the world. I hope to make clearer what this view consists of, and how Swift's ethics inform his vision of the world.

The first group of satiric verses mentioned above has been taken to contain the most characteristic of Swift's poems,¹ and it may be well to examine these quintessentially Swiftian pieces before going on to the milder ones. Where in this group we begin our analysis makes little difference; Huxley's suggestion to read "The Lady's Dressing Room," "Cassinus and Peter," and "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed" will serve well enough. The first piece on Huxley's list, "The Lady's Dressing Room," like many others of Swift's poems is a narrative followed by a commentary. The commentary is ambiguous, as will be seen, but the narrative is, if anything, too clear. Strephon, noticing that his mistress Celia has issued forth from her dressing room (after five hours of preparation for the cruel eyes of the fashionable world), and thinking he is not likely to be disturbed, proceeds to explore his lady's chamber. He is disturbed after all: the room is in disarray, and the lady's clothes in filth. Strephon also smells the room, particularly the toilet cabinet. The results of Strephon's indiscretion are interesting:

But Vengeance, Goddess never sleeping,
Soon punished Strephon for his peeping;
His foul Imagination links
Each Dame he sees with all her stinks.
And, if unsavoury Odours fly,
Conceives a Lady standing by:
All Women his Description fits,
And both Ideas jump like Wits. (529)²

What has happened to Strephon? Obviously, while "disliking bad smells and offal," to quote Huxley again, he has never thought about them, until they were "actually forced upon [his] senses." Now poor Strephon knows that women are "warm-blooded mammifers"; but now he can think of them as nothing else. He has never thought of them as living creatures before, but as love-goddesses, perhaps, or as objects of desire, as Corinas, Celias, Chloes; but neither love-goddesses nor objects of desire are "warm-blooded mammifers."

Strephon finds himself in the same predicament as the supposed author of the Tale of a Tub. Like that worthy, he has penetrated below the superficies of appearance to discover the murky depths of reality, and like that worthy, he is horrified at what he finds down there. "Last week I saw a Woman flay'd, and you will hardly believe how much it alter'd her Person for the worse"³ claims the supposed author of the Tale. This supposed author is, as several critics have made clear, not Swift himself, but a "Modern Author," a hack.⁴ Hence, we cannot presume that Swift shares his opinions; quite the contrary: Swift, standing outside work and the situation in it, can see something about the relation of appearance and reality that the Modern Author cannot see, despite his thorough experiments on the subject. This relationship Strephon cannot

see either. "The Lady's Dressing Room" ends with an ironic hint to what this is:

I pity wretched Strephon blind
 To all the Charms of Female Kind;
 Should I the Queen of Love refuse
 Because she rose from stinking Ooze?

 When Celia in her Glory shows
 If Strephon would but stop his Nose;

 He soon would learn to think like me
 And bless his ravished sight to see
 Such Order from Confusion sprung.
 Such gaudy Tulips raised from Dung. (530)

Strephon, instead of closing his eyes to beauty, should stop his nose to bad smells; then, like the Modern Author's hypothetically happy man, he will be in a state of true "Felicity, called, the Possession of being well deceived; the Serene Peaceful State of being a Fool among Knaves."⁵

But, and this is perhaps the most important point, the beauty that Strephon can no longer see does exist; it is as real as the ugliness which is all his disturbed perception of the world lets him see. Like Gulliver, Strephon has not at all benefited from his recognition of things he had ignored before. Instead of enlarging his perspective on the world, he has merely shifted it. Like Gulliver, he has changed one conception of the world for another, but both are equally limited, and the second is far more uncomfortable than the first. The poet

does have a larger perspective, and so, hopefully, does the reader. What Gulliver sees as only a choice between Houyhnhnm and Yahoo, what Strephon sees as a dichotomy between apparent beauty and real ugliness, the poet sees sub specie eternitatis as part of the total actuality of the real universe, as part of the human -- and divine -- comedy. Ricardo Quintana remarks that Swift possesses a "Dantesque intensity of apprehension,"⁶ by which he means, I think, that Swift, like Dante, was capable of a single, all-encompassing vision of the world; for only a great "intensity of apprehension" permits the synthesis that such a vision requires. But let that pass: I shall refer to Quintana's insight again. Here, it may be noted that "The Lady's Dressing Room" does not perhaps quite bear the interpretation I have put on it. There are too many shocks in the contrasts Swift enunciates: the "Queen of Love" and "slimy Ooze," the "gaudy Tulips" and the "stinking Dung" of the last few lines of the poem do convey a hint that Strephon has made a foolish mistake in believing that all beauty is illusory, but there is too much irony in their phrasing to admit an unambiguous meaning without further evidence. That evidence occurs in "Cassinus and Peter," which treats a similarly catastrophic discovery more clearly and directly. Peter, a Cambridge undergraduate, finds his friend

Cassinus in deep depression. The cause is not far to seek: Celia (a name, by the way, that Swift often uses to typify the coquette, because of its long association with a certain style of love-poetry) has wounded Cassinus' heart, and the wound bids fair to be fatal. "No," he replies to Peter's solicitous questions, "Celia has not left his love unrequited, she has not been cruelly capricious, she has not been unfaithful, nor deserted him for another. And if she had, there would be some consolation in knowing that she had acted only in accord with her rights, privileges, and prerogatives as mistress." Cassinus is a model courtly lover; but Celia is no model mistress. Her crime is so awful that Cassinus can hardly bring himself to name it, and the printer cannot bring himself to print it: it is

A crime that shocks all human Kind;
A Deed unknown to Female race,
At which the Sun should hide his Face.

• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •

Think, Peter, how my Soul is rack'd.
These Eyes, these Eyes beheld the Fact.
Now, bend thine Ear; since out it must;
But, when thou seest me laid in Dust,
The Secret thou shalt ne'er impart;
Not to the Nymph that keeps thy Heart;
(How would her Virgin Soul bemoan
A Crime to all her Sex unknown!)
Nor whisper to the tattling Reeds
The blackest of all Female Deeds.

• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •

And yet, I dare confide in you;
So, take my Secret, and adieu.

Nor wonder how I lost my Wits;
Oh! Caelia, Caelia, Caelia sh---. (595-7)

It is clear why the distraught young man's name rhymes with asinus, and why the poem is sub-titled "A Tragical Elegy." It is clear also that Swift does not here or anywhere "hate the word bowels" as Huxley interprets that phrase, but makes wildly extravagant fun of those that do. We see why he hates the word: it is a euphemism.

The poem operates simply enough. Cassinus is not only hurt by his discovery of a secret his mistress has kept from him, he is utterly confounded by it. In one couplet the "crime" is unknown to women; in the next it is "the blackest of all Female Deeds." The crime, or rather, its discovery, unhinges Cassinus exactly as it unhinges Strephon, and for the same reason: it opens the door to all the unpleasant but real things he has not let into his idealistic concept of women and love, and those ugly things drive out the others. Cassinus has lived in a world of illusion, a world consisting of only part of the real world, and the real world revenges itself on him. Like Strephon, Cassinus exchanges one partial truth for another, and like Strephon he believes he finally has the whole truth, at least about Celia, for surely other women still conform to his ideal! It is ridiculous, says Swift, to

believe an illusion, for sooner or later you will be disillusioned as Strephon and Cassinus were. It is also dangerous to be deluded, for disillusion can produce madness and fatal melancholia (that is, if Cassinus actually will die, a result Swift leaves doubtful).

"Cassinus and Peter" and "The Lady's Dressing Room" demonstrate their theme. They show what can happen if one is forced to face facts he has hitherto preferred to ignore. The same theme will be found again, with variations, in the poems on marriage, but before we discuss those we must look at another poem, one which apparently forces the reader to face the unpleasant facts. This poem tests the reader's illusions in the way fate or chance (or Swift) tested the illusions of Strephon and Cassinus; the poem also implies a judgment that can hardly be found in the others. The poem is "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed."

II

Of all Swift's poems, none has provoked so much abuse as "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed." Modern critics accuse Swift of brutal contempt for the nymph, and of perverse obsession with nauseating detail in himself; the nineteenth century, in the person of Thackeray, accused him of "unmanliness," a fine catch-all pejorative; and even the eighteenth

century was uncertain of the purity of Swift's intentions in writing the poem.⁷ It is difficult to defend the poem and its author against these charges because the immediate and intense reaction tends to prevent rational thinking. Another factor is the poem's implicit but powerful judgment of the reader, a judgment I shall discuss below. First, however, I shall summarize Ehrenpreis's defense of the poem.⁸

Ehrenpreis notes first that the group of the obscene poems to which this one belongs makes up a small -- and, so, suspiciously healthy--percentage of Swift's work; and further, that knowing Swift's intensity and singlemindedness in writing satires on other subjects, we should be suspicious if he did not display the same intensity in satirising prostitution. These remarks in fact are his defense; but they must be supported by detailed evidence of one kind or another. Ehrenpreis makes four points. First, he shows that the poem is of the Juvenalian tradition in English satire, and must be judged as part of that tradition, not as a Freudian lapse in Swift. Secondly, the poem is an expression of Swift's sincerely held belief that fornication is wrong.⁹ Thirdly, the poem is a parody, not of style, which is the only kind of parody we now know, but of attitudes; this is Swift's favorite mode of satire, and is usually called impersonation. Finally, Ehrenpreis

asks in what way this poem can be considered Swift's "most characteristic" work, as Orwell says it is.¹⁰ For poems such as "To Mrs Biddy Floyd" suggest a completely different attitude toward women in Swift. Ehrenpreis implies that if we are going to use the "Beautiful Young Nymph" in evidence against Swift, we must also account for the poems that give a favorable impression of him. Such an account can be made; for both the "Beautiful Young Nymph" and "To Mrs Biddy Floyd" are consistent with Swift's ethic, and both are expressions of a unified, and, as I will show in Chapter two, thoroughly idealistic view of women. First, then, let us look at the young nymph.

"A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed" describes a day, or rather, an evening, in the life of Corinna, "Pride of Drury Lane." She is an aging whore, and must therefore return home about midnight for lack of custom. She climbs to her garret, dismantles herself, examines her sores and treats them, crawls into bed and has nightmares. The poet forbears to describe her reassembly in the morning, but warns

Corinna in the Morning dizen'd,
Who sees will spew; who smells, be poison'd. (583)

The satire works by means of a genetic contrast: the second half of the contrasting pair is the result of the first. More, in the genetic contrast, the metamorphosis of the first, or artificial, stage into the second, or real, is equally important

as the contrast that the metamorphosis generates. Here, the result is satire: the poem both displays the process of Corinna's change into a disgusting object, and emphasises the contrast between her apparently attractive and really repulsive selves. The poem assumes that those who consort with Corinna do not know what they are consorting with, and would not consort with it if they did. That is, the poem assumes that the reader is a Strephon, and shows him both the lady's dressing room and the lady undressing.

But is the reader expected to react like Strephon? Only to a point. Swift does not want us to fall into Strephon's trap, though he makes it easy enough to do so. There is something else in the poem besides disgusting detail: the speaker's attitude is finally more repellent than what he describes. Middleton Murry in his biography of Swift describes this attitude very well:

The horror of such a 'poem' as A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed is not confined to the nausea evoked by the hideous detail; it proceeds equally from the writer's total lack of charity, his cold brutality, towards the wretched woman who is anatomised. It is utterly inhuman.¹¹

What is the function of this "cold brutality" in the poem? Is it merely evidence that Swift's "increasing animus against women"¹² made him lose control over his work, which is how Murry interprets it? Or does this brutality somehow define

the theme?

Murry has observed that the speaker of the poem (who is not necessarily Swift) has refused to treat Corinna as a human being. She is an object, a thing. Why does Swift adopt this attitude? It was certainly not his common attitude to women.¹³ The charming poems to Stella on her birthdays show that he could be as gallantly (though ironically) complimentary as anyone. His delightful compliment to Mrs Biddy Floyd shows that he was uncommonly aware of the humanity of women:

WHEN Cupid did his Grandsire Jove intreat,
To form some Beauty by a new Receit,
Jove sent and found far in a Country Scene,
Truth, Innocence, Good Nature, Look serene;
From which Ingredients, First the dext'rous Boy
Pickt the Demure, the Aukward, and the Coy;
The Graces from the Court did next provide
Breeding, and Wit, and Air, and decent Pride;
These Venus cleans'd from ev'ry spurious Grain
Of Nice, Coquet, Affected, Pert, and Vain.
Jove mix'd up all, and his best Clay employ'd;
Then called the happy Composition, Floyd. (117-18)

Swift praises Mrs Floyd's graces and virtues, and specifically says she has not grain of coquette, of flirt, in her (though she certainly is attractive, for Venus co-operates in her creation). There, in Swift's omission of Mrs Floyd's physical attributes, we have the clue to the presence of the inhumanity in the description of Corinna: for he tells us nothing of her spiritual qualities. Even her nightmares tell us little or

nothing about her psyche, for they too are "Issues, Shankers, running Sores" (1.30). In very characteristic fashion, Swift here adopts a set of attitudes he hates, and takes them to their logical conclusion. The attitudes are those of the libertine, and the libertine revolting at the sight of the aged whore, the no longer plump, beautiful, healthy young thing he seduced years ago; that libertine quite normally treats Corinna with "cold brutality." He never treated her any other way, even when he was her lover.¹⁴

For Swift it was axiomatic that to think only of a woman's physical attributes was to dehumanise her, even if those attributes were her beauty, freshness, grace of movement, and so on. "A Beautiful Young Nymph" not only represents the end-result of a life of whoredom, it also represents the final crystallisation of a set of pernicious attitudes. But the point needs to be emphasised that those attitudes are pernicious only in isolation, for then they form an incomplete and therefore illusory and evil guide to conduct. If, along with a woman's beauty one also recognises her personality, her spirit, to praise her beauty may be good. Even Swift thinks a woman's beauty is worth a compliment occasionally, as we shall see. The libertine's sin is to form his attitudes on a view of the world that ignores if it does not deny the spirit,

perhaps because to admit the spirit would also required admitting the existence of evil in his actions. The reader all too readily identifies with the speaker of "A Beautiful Young Nymph," for Swift's informal tone traps the reader unawares. Having identified with the speaker and his attitudes, the reader is shocked into sudden moral, not merely physical, revulsion: the moral judgment of the poem redounds on the reader. You are responsible for this, says the poem, because of your Strephon-like blindness, because of your Cassinus-like idolatry of love, because of your patronage of Corinna.

That the poem finally judges the reader should not surprise us. Swift's most famous prose satire, the Modest Proposal, does the same thing by almost identical methods. The poem "Betty the Grisette," which describes a silly shop-girl trying to ape her betters, not realising she is aping a sham, also judges the reader, whether he identifies with Betty or her betters. This is true even of the comments on her appearance, for her pride in her good looks is as ill-founded as her pride in her wit; and that is true of us all, according to the theology Swift believed, even of the truly beautiful and witty among us. Other poems, in varying degrees perform the same function; for example, "Progress of Beauty," "The Furniture of a Woman's Mind," "Pethox the Great," and similar

pieces.¹⁵ Some of these will be considered in the next section.

III

The theme that unifies the group of obscene poems is the theme of the folly and danger of holding a partial and hence illusory view of women and love. One implicit theme of all these poems is the evil of licentiousness; and besides such indirect attacks on that vice as are contained in the obscene poems, Swift wrote a number of more direct satires on the subject. Some of these are straightforward ironies, as for example "The True English Dean to be Hanged for a Rape," a poem Ehrenpreis uses as an example of Swift's moral indignation at fornication.¹⁶ Written to fit the tune of a popular ballad, this poem depends for its effect on the assumption that vice is normal, if not exactly respectable, and hardly horrifying: Swift is impersonating again. A few lines will give its flavor; it is unusually entertaining for a Swiftian satire:

A holier Priest ne'er was wrapt up in Crape,
The worst you can say he committed a R--pe.

Shall a Subject so loyal be hang'd by the Nape
For no other Crime but committing a R--pe?

The D--n he was vext that his Whores were so willing,
He long'd for a Girl that would struggle and squal,
He ravish'd her fairly, and saved a good Shilling;
But, here was to pay the Devil and all.

His Troubles and Sorrows now come in a Heap,
And hang'd he must be for committing a R--pe. (516-19)

Other poems are less delicate in tone. For example, "The Problem" uses a motif Chaucer also used, in the Monk's Tale.

The problem is which of the Earl of Romney's¹⁷ mistresses is his favorite. There is a means of discovering this: for

Love's Fire, it seems, like inward Heat,
 Works in my Lord by St--l and Sweat,
 Which brings a St--k from ev'ry Pore,
 And from behind, and from before;
 Yet, what is wonderful to tell it,
 None but the Fav'rite Nymph can smell it. (65)

The problem is solved when the several ladies all smell the earl; it seems "My Lord's a universal Lover."

Worth noting, as evidence that Swift's "sense of outrage"¹⁸ was easily aroused by licentiousness, is the fact that in most of his political and personal lampoons he makes uncomplimentary remarks about his enemies' sexual behavior. In "A Description of a Salamander,"¹⁹ Pliny's account of that reptile is given a bawdy interpretation to fit the character of Lord Cutts, who apparently had as much success in the bedroom as on the battlefield; it was the latter success that brought him his nickname as an honorific, and Swift effectively converts the nickname into a slander. "The Storm,"²⁰ an unwarranted attack on Bishop Hort, with whom Swift was later reconciled, describes a contest between Minerva, who wants the man drowned for a rogue on his crossing to Ireland, and Venus, who wants him spared because he is such an energetic devotee to her

service. Proteus, called in to give evidence, says the man is capable of assuming more shapes than himself, all vicious. In "Directions for a Birthday Song," which broadens into political satire towards the end, there are several references to the royal habit of keeping mistresses. Finally, though this by no means exhausts the list, Swift's attacks on the Duchess of Somerset all make a connection between her red hair and a supposedly licentious disposition (this is one of the few cases where Swift's hatred got the better of his judgment: there is no evidence that the duchess was unchaste). It is clear enough that "as a conscientious priest he wished to discourage fornication," and though his imputation of sexual misbehavior to his victim was often beside the point, it is further evidence that "he took the traditional view of vice."²¹ If his enemies were guilty of immorality as well as of political corruption, or indifference or enmity to Swift, all the more reason to castigate them.

Part of the reason for Swift's traditional view of vice, as we have seen, is that for him vice was nearly related to folly. Both are forms of illusion; that is why they are both forms of the cardinal sin of Pride; and Swift, like Dante, saw Pride as the source of all other sins precisely because it is the archetypal delusion of mankind. Exactly how illusion

informs vice, "The Progress of Beauty" demonstrates. This poem, like "The Lady's Dressing Room" and "A Beautiful Young Nymph," contrasts the appearance of Celia before and after her toilette, and before and after sleeping. A comparison of Celia with Diana, the moon, forms the skeleton of the poem, and provides the concluding joke:

Ye Pow'rs that over Love preside,
 Since mortal Beauties drop so soon,
 If you would have us well supply'd,
 Send us new Nymphs with each New Moon. (229)

Unlike the two poems it resembles, however, this poem is as much concerned with the metaphysics of artifice as with its morality, because of their interdependence. It describes the female ritual beautification in sometimes revolting detail, but its touch is lighter than that of the poems it resembles, and its mood is almost gay. The satire is less malicious than mischievous. Several passages directly recall Pope's Rape of the Lock; for example:

But Celia can with ease reduce
 By help of Pencil, Paint and Brush
 Each Colour to it's Place and Use,
 And teach her Cheeks again to blush.

She knows her early self no more,
 But fill'd with Admiration, stands,
 As other Painters oft adore
 The Workmanship of their own Hands. (227)

Like Pope, Swift makes beauty an attribute that must be added

to the nymph; like Pope, he suggests that a quasi-magical transformation occurs, and like Pope he names the instruments of the transformation. Most importantly, Swift like Pope uses narcissistic, almost religious self-adoration to characterise the quality of Celia's pride in herself. Celia before her mirror is like Belinda before hers; the only difference is in their ages. This difference is crucial, for it allows Swift to turn another of Pope's images on its head: his description of Celia's emergence into the beau monde ironically echoes Pope's account of Belinda's emergence into the fashionable world of Hampstead Court:

She ventures now to lift the Sash,
The Window is her proper Sphere;
Ah Lovely Nymph be not too rash,
Nor let the Beaux approach too near.

Take Pattern by your Sister Star,
Delude at once and Bless our Sight,
When you are seen, be seen from far,
And chiefly chuse to shine by Night.

In the Pell-Mell when passing by,
Keep up the Glasses of your Chair,
Then each transported Fop will cry,
G-d d-m me Jack, she's wondrous fair. (228)

Pope's Belinda is young and beautiful, Swift's Celia is old and well-preserved; Belinda is compared to the sun, Celia to the moon; Belinda gives the blessing of her sight to all impartially, Celia is appraised with an oath. Swift's echo of

Pope is more than mere parody for the sake of wit, it is a judgment on Pope. Pope, even though condemning Belinda's inversion of values, admires her beauty, her grace, her charm; he has been taken in by the illusion he condemns in her. Swift is certainly not taken in by Celia; that is why he contrasts her with Belinda even while making her an imitation of sorts. For Swift, there can be no excuse for holding illusions: what Pope does not indicate, what Swift indicates for him, is that Belinda will end as Celia. Some, who hold that poetry must celebrate the beautiful, would say that Pope was the better poet of the two; I think we must say that Swift was the more honest.

The theme of "The Progress of Beauty" is simple enough: if too high a value is set on beauty, beauty will be corrupted, for the natural article will be replaced by the artificial. But this corruption, though innocuous enough in itself (so far at least, Pope is right), will spread until the whole person physically and morally rots and festers. Celia ends like Corinna, in fact becomes Corinna:

So rotting Celia stroles the Street
When sober Folks are all a-bed.

For sure if this be Luna's Fate,
Poor Celia, but of mortall Race,
In vain expects a longer Date
To the Materialls of her Face.

When Mercury her Tresses mows
To think of Oyl and Soot, is vain,
No Painting can restore a Nose,
Nor will her Teeth return again.

Two Balls of Glass may serve for Eyes,
White Lead can plaister up a Cleft,
But these alas, are poor Supplyes,
If neither Cheeks, nor Lips be left. (229)

The progress of beauty is inevitable: Belinda becomes Celia,
and Celia becomes Corinna.

CHAPTER TWO: "THAT RIDICULOUS PASSION"

I

A group of poems closely related to the obscene poems in theme, and because of their imagery often included with that group, is that consisting of satires on love, marriage, and women. One of Swift's Thoughts on Various Subjects makes clear why love, marriage, and women must be considered together in a study of his verse:

The Reason why so few Marriages are happy is because young ladies spend their Time in making Nets and not in making Cages.¹

The consequences of making nets rather than cages are the subject of two nearly related poems, "Phillis, or The Progress of Love" and "The Progress of Beauty." Both titles make ironic puns on "progress," with its meanings of process, change, journey, and improvement.

In the first of these poems, Swift shows the effect of making nets of romantic stuff. The heroine, a young and totally inexperienced girl whose only knowledge of life is the kind derivable from novels (Swift is also making a comment on women's education here), cannot be found on her wedding day. Neither can the butler, John. They have eloped together. Instead of Phillis, only her letter to her father waits in her

room, for

'Tis always done, Romances tell us,
When Daughters run away with Fellows. (223)

Phillis' explanations and excuses further model her romantic prototypes:

...long ago a Fortune-teller
Exactly said what now befell her,
And in a Glass had made her see
A serving-Man of low Degree:
It was her Fate; must be forgiven;
For Marriages are made in Heaven:
His pardon begg'd, but to be plain,
She'd do't if 'twere to do again.
Thank God, 'twas neither Shame nor Sin,
For John was come of honest Kin;
Love never thinks of Rich and Poor;
She'd beg with John from Door to Door:
Forgive her, if it be a Crime,
She'll never do't another Time,
She ne'er before in all her life
Once disobey'd him, Maid nor Wife.
One Argument she summ'd up all in,
The Thing was done and past recalling:
And therefore hop'd she would recover
His Favor, when his Passion's over.
She valued not what others thought her;
And was -- His most obedient Daughter. (223-4)

The kind of inconsistent hodge-podge of ideals, sophistries, and banalities that Phillis indulges in we have seen before, in Cassinus' case. His speeches are remarkably like Phillis'. In his case, the result was a fit of depression made bearable by visions of tragical suffering; here, the result is inexorable physical and moral degradation, for not a theory of love, but of marriage, which is a social contract, is to find

foundations in that swamp of silly remanticisms. Soon enough the unromantic facts of hunger, wet, cold, and weariness assert themselves. The couple's "progress" into disreputability is hardly worth the trouble of recounting, it is so predictable:

Bit what Adventures more befell 'um
 The Muse has now not Time to tell 'em.
 How Johnny wheadled, threatn'd, fawn'd,
 Till Phillis all her Trinkets pawn'd:
 How oft she broke her marriage Vows
 In kindness to maintain her Spouse;
 Till Swains unwholsome spoyl'd the Trade,
 For now the Surgeon must be paid;
 To whom those perquisites are gone
 In Christian Justice due to John.
 When Food and Rayment now grew scarce
 Fate put a period to the Farce;
 And with exact Poetick Justice:
 For John is Landlord, Phillis Hostess;
 They keep at Stains the old blue boar,
 Are Cat and Dog, and Rogue and Whore. (224-5)

What started out as the assertion of belief in an ideal love ends in misery and degradation. One may think that marriages are made in Heaven, but they are lived on Earth, and any denial of that fact will make of marriage a Hell. Moreover, marriages are not made in Heaven after all:

What they do in Heaven we are ignorant of; what they do not, we are told expressly: that they neither marry nor are given in marriage.²

Phillis professes above all the ideal of self-sacrifice in love, for she sacrifices her home, the possibility of a secure marriage, her father's goodwill and largesse all for the

love of John; and later, she makes further sacrifices of her jewellery and chastity. Swift implies that this is an inevitable pattern. For what Phillis takes for love is infatuation, her self-sacrifice is rebelliousness and fake martyrdom, her supposed fulfillment of her destiny is the impulsive act of a girl too much dependent on books for a knowledge of life. As for John -- his motives for agreeing to his mistress' scheme are suspect in any case.

Phillis was the victim of an illusory, because incomplete, theory of life; her ideal of love failed to, did not even attempt to, reconcile the actualities of existence with the possibilities of human living. That she was a willing victim, is shown by her letter. Her story, though perhaps too neat, is a convincing piece of moral realism. The details of the physical misfortunes that befall Phillis and John, and of their peevish second thoughts in consequence, add naturalism to the moral realism of their story. The naturalistic and realistic elements in this poem suggest that Swift might have been one of our first novelists instead of the first writer of science-fiction.³ What he lacks, however, is a sentimental willingness to take Phillis and John seriously, a willingness to suppose that their misfortunes matter. Swift not only lacks this willingness to attach importance to his characters, he

attacks the attitudes out of which that willingness grows.

The novelist's eye for detail, and grasp of order in the apparent disorder of life, are evident again in "The Progress of Marriage," which tells of two other victims of illusion. But the emphasis in this poem is less on the descent in social status and decline of fortune that are Phillis' and John's lot, than on the moral and intellectual consequences of foolishness. Swift uses the motif of the May-December marriage, basing his poem on an actual instance, and making direct allusion to it.⁴ The old husband and the young wife think they can make a go of it, but the first disappointment comes on the wedding night, and thereafter things go from bad to worse. Whatever Dean Pratt expected in a wife, he did not get it, and his wife's ideals of marriage are best said to be nonexistent. But besides the fact that neither spouse has anything like clear idea of what a marriage is or might be, neither has a chance of ever finding out:

And, thus set out the happy Pair,
The Swain is rich, the Nymph is fair;
But, which I gladly would forget,
The Swain is old, the Nymph Coquette,
Both from the Goal together start;
Scarce run a Step before they part;
No common ligament that binds
The various Textures of their Minds,
Their Thoughts, and Actions, Hopes, and Fears
Less corresponding than their Years. (290-91)

Will This Marriage Work? No.

It might be thought that Swift is warning against extreme differences in background and age, but that this is only part of his intention is clear if we ask how these couples would have fared if they had had a realistic apprehension of the problems they faced, problems which in any case are only exaggerated by social and other differences. Swift's technique is that of using what the mathematicians call the extreme or limiting case: he uses a set of circumstances that will isolate the essential features of the problem of marriage. At the same time he implies, and the implication is surprisingly strong, that a less romantic or fatuous idea of marriage might have made life tolerable for the couples he describes. For after making sure the reader understands the kind of mismatching represented by the marriages, Swift makes no further reference to the disparity in age and background; instead, he accumulates evidence that a lack of common decency and common consideration for each other destroys the marriages. There is an ideal of marriage implicit here; in "Strephon and Chloe" Swift includes the ideal as explicit comment on the situation he has depicted.

Swift uses the technique of the limiting case in "Strephon and Chloe" also; here, the extreme situation in which all the factors of the problem will be exhibited is the wedding

night. The poem is a parody of an epithalamion.⁵ Swift begins with the conventional descriptions of the wedding, the guests, the feast, and so on, using all the appropriate and common allusions to Venus, Hymen, and other necessary deities. But instead of drawing a veil of decorous symbolism over the activities of the wedding night, Swift delineates the problem that must have bothered more than one romantically love-struck bridegroom in the same situation:

BUT, still the hardest Part remains.
Strephon has long perplexed his Brains,
 How with so high a Nymph he might
 Demean himself the Wedding Night:
 For, as he view'd his Person round,
 Meer mortal Flesh was all he found:
 .
 While she a Goddess dy'd in Grain
 Was unsusceptible of Stain:
 And, Venus-like, her fragrant Skin
 Exhal'd Ambrosia from within:
 Can such a Deity endure
 A mortal human Touch impure? (586)

The illogic of godhead being damaged by mere mortality does not become apparent to Strephon. Besides, the problem solves itself: the "Goddess" has overindulged in liquids at the wedding feast and must relieve herself. This proof of her fleshliness emboldens Strephon to imitate her; that is the end of romance:

THE little Cupids hove'ring round,
 (As Pictures prove) with Garlands crown'd,
 Abash'd at what they saw and heard,
 Flew off, nor evermore appear'd.
 ADIEU to ravishing Delights,

High Raptures and romantic Flights;
 To Goddesses so Heav'nly sweet,
 Expiring Shepherds at their Feet;
 To silver Meads, and shady Bow'rs,
 Drest up with Amaranthine Flow'rs. (590)

After about ninety or so lines of considering the necessities of that result, and the possibilities of avoiding it, Swift ends with a famous recipe for marriage, a recipe considered "excellent matrimonial advice" by W.E. Browning.⁶

ON Sense and Wit your Passion found,
 By Decency cemented round;
 Let Prudence and Good Nature strive,
 To keep Esteem and Love alive.
 Then come old Age whene'er it will,
 Your Friendship shall continue still:
 And thus a mutual gentle Fire,
 Shall never but with Life expire. (593)

An earlier expression of Swift's theory of marriage occurs in his notorious last letter to Jane Waring, or Varina, whom he rejected in a maddeningly ambiguous tone. Four years earlier in 1696, he had offered to marry Varina in an astonishingly passionate letter, couched in thoroughly romantic terms; his love of Varina as he describes it is exactly what the theory of romantic love requires, complete with affirmations of willingness to sacrifice everything for his mistress' sake, of the superiority of love to every other earthly ambition, of the divine innocence of "this passion [which] has a property peculiar to itself, to be most commendable in its

extremes."⁷ The letter ends with a linking of death and unrequited love that is thoroughly conventional except perhaps in its sincerity:

"Only remember," writes Swift, "that if you still refuse to be mine, you will quickly lose, for ever lose, him that is resolved to die as he has lived, all yours."⁸

Jane Waring temporised, pleading ill-health, and the match Swift had pleaded for in such self-abasing fashion never came off. But four years later, Swift having returned successful to Ireland, and with bright prospects of advancement before him, Jane Waring reminded him of his offer; he acknowledged it by making demands she could not meet:

. . . let me know if your health be otherwise than it was when the doctors advised you against marriage, as what would certainly hazard your life. . . Are you in a condition to manage domestic affairs, with an income of perhaps less than three hundred pounds a year? Have you such an inclination to my person and humor, as to comply with my desires and way of living, and endeavour to make us both as happy as you can? Will you be ready to engage in those methods I shall direct for the improvement of your mind, so as to make us entertaining company for each other, when we are neither visiting nor being visited? Can you bend your love and esteem to others the same way as I do mine? Shall I have so much power in your heart, or you so much government over your passions, as to grow in good humor on my approach, though provoked by a ---? Have you so much good nature as to endeavour by soft words to smooth any rugged humor occasioned by the cross accidents of life? Shall the place where your husband is thrown be more welcome than courts or cities without him? In short, these are some of the necessary methods to please men, who, like me, are deep-read in the world; and to a person thus made, I should be proud in giving all due returns towards making her happy. These are the questions I have always resolved to propose to her with whom I meant to pass my life; and whenever you can heartily answer them in the affirmative, I shall be blessed to have you in my

arms, without regarding whether your person be beautiful, or your fortune large. Cleanliness in the first, and competency in the other, is all I look for.⁹

Ignore its context and tone, and this series of questions expresses a remarkably idealistic view of marriage, and an almost impossible one to realise. Swift's idealism here goes further than the idealisms he disparages in his satires, for he demands practical perfection; he requires that the marriage be made perfect not by ignoring or excising the undesirable elements of the spouse's character (which are Phillis' and Gulliver's methods respectively of perfecting the human race), but by regenerating them. All the qualities and character traits he mentions he wishes to change or add to; none of his questions are phrased negatively. He demands that the spouses adapt to each other (for he will be "proud to make all due returns towards making [his wife] happy"), that they change, and that the change be for the better. His insistence that man be made perfect by changing qualities he already possesses, or by adding to these qualities (as knowledge and judgment is to be added to Varina's mind if she accepts Swift's proposal), is of the essence of the Christian doctrine of redemption. The opposite insistence that man be made perfect by destroying the Yahoo in him, as Gulliver wishes to do, is anathema to Swift. To find a version of the doctrine of

redemption in Swift's ideal of marriage confirms the completeness of his vision; it proves that behind all his destructive irony there is a solid positive reality that justifies the irony, in fact, makes it possible. That positive reality is the moral order of the universe, which not only enables and justifies the use of irony, but also provides a standard for measuring the distortion in the satire, and pronounces a moral judgment on satiric victim and reader alike. Moreover, it is this reality that enables Swift to use the very conventions he condemns as illusory: the Stella poems wittily employ the romantic love-conventions to compliment Stella, as will be seen below.

The letter to Varina quoted earlier has often been read as displaying Swift's cold proud brutality towards her.¹⁰ But it is considered cold and proud, even arrogant, not so much because of its perfectionism, as because it places the burden of success in marriage on the wife. In essence it says that the wife must adapt herself to the husband, while he is bound to offer only the reward of his affectionate regard. This principle informs another of Swift's disquisitions on marriage, the Letter to a Young Lady on her Marriage.¹¹ The coldness and pride of the letter to Varina, if they are really there, have little to do with Swift's concept of marriage

however; they are the consequence of Varina's dithering four years earlier. But Swift's insistence that the wife adapt herself to her husband reflects his feeling that a marriage, a home, the "domestic conversation" he cultivated with Stella and Dingley, are or can be the only things that a man can hope will bring contentment if not happiness to his life. He knew this belief was no mere ideal. "The First of April"¹² is a warm and witty compliment to a woman who had in fact made of her home a haven for her family. Apollo sends the Muses to the Copes, charging each of them with caring for one of the nine young Copes. When the nine ladies arrive they find such a scene of domestic bliss and happiness (Swift almost degenerates into bathos here), that they conclude they have been sent on a fool's errand. They remember the date, and realise what kind of fools they are.

Swift's praise of Mrs Cope, his demands on Varina, his contempt for the wives in "The Progress of Love" and "The Progress of Marriage," all indicate that Swift thought the wife was the person who determined the success or failure of marriage. The question is, why? The simplest answer is, he saw enough examples of stupid wives and unhappy husbands about him, and he was a man. "The Furniture of a Woman's Mind" and "The Journal of a Modern Lady" both describe the kind of woman a man

should not marry, and the kind of woman a girl should not wish to become: shallow, vain, careless, affected, thoughtless, spendthrift, and so on. Phillipa, in "The Progress of Marriage," is a further sample. In the Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift, we find a charming and surprisingly indulgent portrait of such women playing cards and chattering about the Dean's death and their game:

MY Female Friends, whose tender Hearts
 Have better learned to act their Parts,
 Receive the News in doleful Dumps,
 "The Dean is dead, (and what is Trumps?)
 "(Ladies, I'll venture for the Vole)
 "Then Lord have Mercy on his Soul.
 "Six Deans they say must bear his Pall.
 "(I wish I knew what King to call.)
 "Madam, your Husband will attend
 "The Funeral of so good a Friend.
 "No, Madam, 'tis a shocking Sight,
 "And he's engaged To-morrow Night!
 "My Lady Club would take it ill,
 "If he should fail her at Quadrille.
 "He lov'd the Dean. (I lead a Heart.)
 "But dearest Friends, they say, must part.
 "His Time was come, he ran his Race;
 "We hope he's in a better Place. (562)

These women are not evil, except in their thoughtlessness; and Swift charitably turns their unthinking prattle into subtle comedy by the juxtaposition of subliminally related phrases, for example, "He lov'd the Dean. (I lead a Heart.)" The clue to Swift's attitude towards them occurs in the first two lines quoted: the ladies act their sorrow over the Dean's death, but their acting is better than their husband's, whose

acrimonious and pompous comment Swift has been foreseeing in the previous lines. The ladies do not allow their sorrow to interfere with the game: they possess a certain sense of propriety. Perhaps they act better because of their "tender Hearts," their real sympathy. Nevertheless, they are foolish and it is against foolishness that Swift warns the young bride in his Letter to her. Her foolishness is not entirely her own fault; she has not been educated to be an intelligent and entertaining companion to her husband, so that it is a negative quality, a lack, rather than a positive vice which might ruin her marriage. (Swift offered to supply this lack.) Because the young lady has an incomplete and hence illusory view of her future status, she is in danger of adopting a delusory one. Once again, the connection between illusion and vice is a close one, and except for Swift's warning (which the young lady in question, Miss Betty Moore, did not appreciate), an inevitably catastrophic one.

The urgency of the warning and its peculiar refusal to blame the young lady for her ignorance suggest that Swift's portrait of his "Female Friends" is not intended for particularly cutting satire. Swift rather pitied the ladies (an unusual reaction in him, and one the ladies would not tolerate),

for not they, but their fathers and husbands are responsible for their empty heads and sentimental hearts. (What can be done in the way of educating a girl, and what she must suffer at the hands of fashionable men and women in consequence, is one of the subjects of Cadenus and Vanessa). It is curious that none of the commentators on Swift's misogyny have noticed the correlative attitude of contempt for the stupid husband. Swift wastes no sympathy on Strephon; and Philippa's husband, the aging Dean Pratt, cuts a very sorry figure indeed.¹³ Most significant, Phillis' beloved John turns pimp. It seems Dean Swift thought it took two to wreck a marriage.

Swift's satires on women make up a considerable part of his total work. The faults and follies of the fair sex were a favorite topic. If Swift was preoccupied with anything, it was with women; for his repeated slanders on them can mean only that the actual women he knew (with very few exceptions, all of which, I suspect, were commemorated in his verse), fell far short of his ideal. And Swift's ideal woman, set beside those empty-headed ninnies of his satires, appears not as an angel of super-human virtues and goodness, still less as a goddess, but as a real live woman set beside a cardboard dummy. The compliment to Mrs Biddy Floyd, quoted earlier, shows what

such a woman is. And if one's mistress is such a woman, one can indulge in tenderly romantic ironies in her praise, as Swift does in several poems written for Stella on her birthday. None of these I think is as charming as this one, the first of them all:

Stella this Day is thirty-four,
(We won't dispute a Year or more)
However, Stella, be not troubled.
Although thy Size and Years have doubled,
Since first I saw Thee at Sixteen
The brightest Virgin of the Green,
So little is thy Form declin'd
Made up so largely in thy Mind.
Oh, would it please the Gods to split
Thy Beauty, Size, and Years, and Wit,
No Age could furnish out a Pair
Of Nymphs so gracefull, Wise, and fair
With half the Lustre of your Eyes,
With half thy Wit, thy Years, and Size:
And then before it grew too late,
How would I beg of gentle Fate,
(That either Nymph might have her Swain,)
To split my Worship too in twain. (721-2)

There we have Swift the romantic, How carefully realistic he is!

CHAPTER THREE: THE RELIGION OF POLITICS

I

Swift's political verse- satires have on the whole been badly neglected. Biographers have used them, it is true, to illustrate a move or a mood in the complex political games Swift took part in, and historians no doubt have found some of them useful. But few writers have made even passing remarks about these verses as poetry. Murry finds "plenty of zest"¹ in "Toland's Invitation to Dismal."² Carl Van Doren, however, discusses only a dozen poems in all, and only one of them, "The Windsor Prophecy,"³ had a political occasion. Characteristically, Van Doren sees that poem as evidence of Swift's neurotic hatred of all who had thwarted his desire for preferment in England; its political meaning he ignores. The same kind of indifference is found in Orwell, who thinks Swift's political thought as expressed Gulliver worth extended comment, but who thought "A Beautiful Young Nymph" Swift's "most characteristic" poem.⁴ More interesting is Leslie Stephen's complete silence on both the obscene and political poems:

[On the Death of Dr. Swift] and two or three other performances of the same period [the early 1730's], especially the Rhapsody on Poetry and the Verses to a Lady, are Swift's chief title to be called a poet. How far that name can be conceded him is a question of classification. . . .⁵

Clearly, the political poems might be well-turned verses at best; but they are not real poetry. Finally, even Herbert Davis, the only critic who thought Swift's poems worth a separate essay,⁶ does not mention the political poems as such.

This attitude of near-indifference may be easy enough to explain as an example of our century's hard-won suspicion of propaganda, but it is a pity just the same. The political satires constitute the largest single group of Swift's serious verse; only the number of the so-called trifles, many of which do not trifle with their subject at all, is larger. Swift spent a great deal of time and energy on his propaganda pieces, and criticism of his work ought to contain some serious consideration of them, though their bulk alone is hardly sufficient reason for giving them attention as poetry. But sufficient reason can be found. A cursory reading of the political poems leaves one with the impression of consistently good craftsmanship; of variety of effects; and of a surprising independence of their contemporary context: even without knowledge of the occasions, most of the poems are intelligible, and many actually gain by being divorced from immediate application. The poems' ethical and political principles are timeless, and that timelessness implies art.

There is one more reason, and this too a major one,

for taking the political verse seriously as poetry. This is Swift's consuming interest in politics. No English poet, with the possible exception of Milton, was as completely and deeply committed to a political view of life as was Swift. The politically oriented poets of the nineteen-thirties were committed to particular ideologies, but they did not, as Swift did, see man's political life as an extension of man's spiritual being into the temporal world; they believed that man was determined by politics instead of vice-versa. Swift believed that a man's responsibility to God, as well as to himself and to his fellow-men, demanded political commitment.⁷ However much Swift's behavior was qualified by the desire for personal advancement (and more than once Swift deluded himself about the actual motive of an attack), his behavior was never determined by personal interests alone. He believed, and constantly expressed the belief, that sound political action is impossible without an ethical theory of the state, for that theory would be no more than an extension of an ethical theory of man. He never ceased believing that "greatness without goodness -- whatever goodness may be -- is despicable."⁸ His epitaph on himself shows that he wished to be remembered in the world for his action in the world, and that that was political action:

Here lies the body of Jonathan Swift, of this Cathedral Church Dean, where savage indignation can lacerate his heart no more. Traveller go, and imitate if you can his strenuous vindication of human liberty.⁹

Swift was a poet. He was committed to political action as few men have ever been. We should expect his poetry to express his commitment; but, more, we should expect Swift to have put into his poetry the metaphors and symbols that embody his political thought: its structure, its ethics, and its quality. We should expect to find more than merely political propaganda: we should expect propaganda for a particular vision of the world. Our expectations will not be disappointed.

II

For Swift, to observe greed and power-hunger moving politicians and generals to action is to observe obscenities; to ensure that we see what he sees, he describes these obscenities in terms that even the average man would consider obscene. The "Elegy on the Death of A Late Famous General" is a mild case in point, but a good one, for it proves that obscenity is a matter of attitudes, not facts:

His Grace! Impossible! what dead!
Of old Age too, and in his bed!
And could that mighty Warrior fall?
And so inglorious, after all! (269)

The irreverence of the opening lines will be considered close to blasphemy by a certain kind of mind. The next few lines, with their eschatological allusions, make matters worse -- or

better. Then comes something relatively rare in Swift, direct insult, a "brutal callousness":¹⁰

This world he cumber'd long enough
He burnt his Candle to the Snuff;
And that's the reason, some folks think,
He left behind so great a s--k. (296)

Applied to a pig-pen, "stink" refers to an unpleasant fact; applied to the Duke of Marlborough, it expresses a value judgment. For those who agree with Swift (and we must, I think, agree with the justice of the judgment, however much we dislike the harshness of the sentence), the obscenity implied by "stink" lies in the Duke's life, especially its latter part, marked as it was by graft and venality. For those who disagree, the obscenity lies in the judgment itself: a Duke does not stink!

The stink literally is the stench of death; metaphorically, it is the stench of moral decay. Swift leaves no doubt which stench he considers the worse, and he does this by describing its origins:

Behold his funeral appears,
Nor widow's sighs, nor orphan's tears,
Wont at such times each heart to pierce,
Attend the progress of the hearse.
But what of that, his friends may say,
He had those honors in his day.
True to his profit and his pride,
He made them weep before he died. (296)

There is no mention of pomp and circumstance accompanying the

Duke to his grave; instead there is the apparent pathos of an old forsaken man's lonely hearse. But this pathos is a parody, and it swiftly modulates to the bitterly ironic anger at lust for money and military glory driving the greatest general of his time, and a long time after, to his undeniable successes. Here is greatness without goodness indeed. The moral decay is the metaphoric equal of the physical; Swift uses a commonplace here, and if anything is new about his use of it, it is his insistence that if the stench of death offend, how much more must the stench of vice offend. The intensity of the concrete imagery generates Swift's insistence and the reaction in the reader.

The epitaph, a parody of the conventional exhortation to remember Death and the vanity of human wishes, repeats the chief image of the poem in its use of the common "dirt" instead of the ritual "dust":

Let pride be taught by this rebuke,
How very mean a thing's a Duke;
From all his ill-got honors flung,
Turn'd to the dirt from whence he sprung. (297)

The effect is electrifying. The sudden intrusion of the realistic word in place of the ritual one forces attention: it is the only departure from convention, and, ironically, through it the parody carries more significance and truth than its original.

"The Elegy" is an admirable piece of work, however "ungenerous"¹¹ its motives. It is also a key to understanding Swift's political thought. The grounds for the attack on Marlborough were simple enough: he was a general and hence an instrument of war--and Swift hated war with truly warlike ferocity. But Marlborough's generalship would have been forgivable, as general Hill's was, if he had brought peace. General Hill was praised by Swift for prosecuting the war efficiently, and for bringing about a peace as quickly as possible.¹² Marlborough was suspected of wishing to continue the war, both for glory's and lucre's sake. (Swift's essay¹³ on the relative costs of rewarding a British and a Roman general makes that suspicion a certainty). Another poem on Marlborough, "The Fable of Midas," satirises particularly his covetousness, and at the same time offers a profound insight into the sources of that vice:

But Gold defiles with frequent Touch,
 There's nothing fouls the Hands so much:
 And Scholars give it for the Cause
 Of British Midas dirty paws. . .
 . . . Midas now neglected stands
 With Asses Ears, and dirty Hands. (158)

Again it is the concreteness, the actuality of the image, that generates the Swiftian intensity; it is the means of forcing us to recognise the true nature of the vice. The anal fixation is not Swift's, it is his victim's (as Norman O. Brown

points out in his brilliant essay on "The Excremental Vision,"¹⁴ where he argues that Swift's insights into the sources of human vice are those later "discovered" by Freud). But if, in the "Fable," avarice is merely disgusting, and somewhat pitifully ridiculous, in the "Elegy" it is horrifying: "True to his profit and his pride, He made them weep before he died." The understatement of the irony gives it its power; we do a double take on reading these lines.

There is also an ironic callousness in these lines, the same kind as appears in the Modest Proposal, and which Murry complains of in "A Beautiful Young Nymph." This callousness has often been mistaken for Swift's misanthropy, but it is not his. The implications of all the cruelties of war in the Elegy, the horrors of the Modest Proposal, the disgust of the "Beautiful Young Nymph," these things do not focus our attention on the victims so much as on the perpetrators. This perpetrator is not Swift. It is the general, the mercantilist, the libertine. Their victims were mere instruments of Swift's satire, they are part of the stuff that wit takes and makes irony of. There is apparent cruelty in this exploitation of the idea of suffering, and this cruelty horrifies. One feels that Swift ought to evoke pity for the victims of war, of capitalism, and of libertinism. But in not making specific,

sentimental reference to the victim's suffering, Swift imitates the attitudes of the targets of his satire; and he forces the reader to feel what it is to be indifferent to pain and misery. That feeling the reader rejects, and in his revulsion fastens the callousness he will not admit in himself on Swift. (The phenomenon is very like the mental patient's projection of his loathed self onto the psychiatrist, who is consequently hated -- and later loved.) Swift hated the obscenities of human behavior exhibited in war, in the mercantilist economy, in the condoning of prostitution, because all these cause unnecessary, and therefore evil, suffering. He impersonates the kind of man that can accept and condone, and even advocate these institutions as rational solutions to difficult problems; and in so impersonating the man, Swift judges him, for he displays what is essentially wrong with him.

And what in essence is wrong with Marlborough? In a sense, his root-vice was a sort of moral stupidity, a lack of moral imagination. He was unable or unwilling to conceive of the consequences of his preference of his immediate personal good over the general good; he would or could not imagine his having to accept responsibility for those consequences. His greed was a private weakness, and it alone would hardly have moved Swift to attack.¹⁵ But Marlborough was a public

figure: his private vices had public consequences. His unwillingness to understand the moral significance of that fact was more than sufficient reason to move the attack. For even when Swift's attacks were unmerited, he never attacked for purely political reasons. Every political attack was justified on moral grounds. What Swift attacks in his political enemies is always imaged as a moral failing.

Swift believed that political evil was moral evil. In "Toland's Invitation to Dismal," a poem attacking the Whigs, we find a powerful image of moral evil as the first, theme-defining scene in the Calves' Head Club:^{15a}

Tomorrow we our Mystick Feast prepare,
 Where Thou, our latest Proselyte, shalt share:
 When we, by proper Signs and Symbols tell,
 How, by Brave Hands, the Royal TRAYTOR fell;
 The Meat shall represent the TYRANT'S Head,
 The Wine, his Blood, our Predecessors shed:
 Whilst an alluding Hymn some Artist sings,
 We toast confusion to the Race of Kings:
 At Monarchy we nobly shew our Spight
 And talk what Fools call Treason all the Night.

(pp. 162-163)

The references to the Crucifixion, the Communion, the Kingship of Christ are unmistakable.¹⁶ So are their inversions: the satanic revolt against God (supposedly successful), the cannibal's custom of eating the enemy, the demonic pride reminiscent of Paradise Lost. The final couplet of this verse-paragraph, with its multiple allusions to free-thinking, spiritual pride,

romantic or satanic rebellion, brings the meaning of the black mass solidly into focus: the evil is a present one, and its political consequences are everywhere visible.

We noted an echo, though a distant one, of Paradise Lost just now; the shape of "Toland's Invitation to Dismal" also echoes the structure of the satanic progress into absurdity as perceived by Milton.¹⁷ Following the truly frightening evocation of the power of evil in that image of a black mass, Swift gives us an image of the puerile braggadocio of wine, which dwindle^s by degrees into garrulity and nonsense. The grandiose symbol of the rebellion's victory is a drunken brawl; the evidence of the lofty claims to special insight is mere babble.

Lust for money and hunger for glory, if acted on as Marlborough acted on them, both entail wilfull moral ignorance. But worse than these, because it is a demonic imitation of a virtue, is party-allegiance. For the pride that leads the members of the Calves' Head Club to celebrate their parody of a Communion has its source in their sense of party. In religious terms, they are Gnostics: they "talk what Fools call Treason all the Night." They are a group with special knowledge, and, therefore, they believe, a special destiny, and a special immunity. The rest of the country, the rest of creation, exist simply as a means to that special destiny, and a proof of that special immunity.

Now Swift loved the practical side of politics; it was his kind of war. But he always believed himself to be in fact above party. He was a Whig when he could still believe that the Whigs expressed his political ideals; and his later loyalty to the Tories was his expression of his loyalty to the whole state. Quintana defends Swift's apparent inconsistency of political allegiance against the all-too easy charge of opportunism by stressing that Swift's loyalties were in the final analysis supra-partisan, and we cannot but agree with him.¹⁸ If Swift was wrong in believing that a party could defend supra-partisan principles, it was because he was in essence a seventeenth century man, and the seventeenth century still believed that government in the interest of the whole state was possible. Church and King came first, and in that order, for they were both, the one spiritually and the other temporally, the sources of that order and stability in this world that Swift believed to be the first worldly aims of man.¹⁹ To place the welfare of party above the welfare of the state was to mistake their values; but to identify the state with the party, was to suffer a totally evil delusion. And of course the private equivalent of partisanship, and its usual correlate, was self-seeking.

Such inversion or confusion of values Swift attacked again and again, sometimes by means of pun, parody, and ironic

imitation, but often by using the satanic metaphor.²⁰ Another example of the deliberate negation of the Christian symbols used occurs in "Sid Hamet, or the Magician's Rod." Here, the opening lines of the poem state the theme, and the rest vary it in more or less ingeniously punning ways:

The Rod was but a harmless Wand,
 While Moses held it in his Hand,
 But soon as e'er he laid it down,
 'Twas a devouring Serpent grown.

OUR great Magician, Hamet Sid,
 Reverses what the Prophet did;
 His Rod was honest English Wood,
 That, senseless, in a Corner stood,
 Till Metamorphos'd by his Grasp,
 It grew an all-devouring Asp;
 Would hiss, and sting, and roll, and twist,
 By the meer Virtue of his Fist:
 But when he laid it down, as quick
 Resum'd the Figure of a Stick. (p. 132)

We need not trace the careful way Swift works out the magical imagery here and in the rest of the poem. But we should know that Sid Hamet is Sidney, first Earl of Godolphin, who was Lord Treasurer from 1702 to 1710, and was eased out of office in that year when the Tories assumed power in the Commons. The Rod was his staff of office, his symbol of power, which he was required to break. Swift sees that the rod functions magically (in the anthropologist's sense), and therefore that power in the hands of the wrong person, or held for the wrong reasons, will have diabolic consequences. There

is something satanic in Godolphin's lust for power; at least, in the eyes of Swift there is. Lust for power itself is evil; never mind the possible effects of its abuse.

Part of the satire of "Sid Hamet" is that it takes seriously the proposition that statecraft is a mystery -- but it is an arcane mystery, whose master is the Devil. Swift distrusted subtle politics; he believed that common sense and a willingness to reasonable compromise were sufficient -- nay, the best -- qualifications for the statesman. His "Thoughts on the Present State of Affairs" contains a sly irony on super-subtle politicians:

. . . Those governors who were most distinguished for their mysterious skill in government, found by the event, that they had ill consulted their own quiet, or the ease and happiness of their people.²¹

Further, Gulliver's Travels contains several explicit satires on the "mystery" and rituals of politics; and some poems, notably "The Discovery," poke fun at the idea of the difficulty of the art.²²

There is another way of looking at the politician: as a minor demon himself. In "Prometheus," Wood is accused of those sins of which Satan too is guilty: rebellion, pride, and subversion. There was a chain of gold, writes Swift, that bound mankind to Jove in perfect devotion and obedience. Prometheus stole that chain and substituted a brazen one:

Now while this Brazen Chain prevail'd
Jove saw that all Devotion fail'd;
No Temple, to his Godship rais'd,
No Sacrifice on Altars blaz'd;
In short such dire Confusion followed,
Earth must have been in Chaos swallowed.

(pp. 345-346)

Swift's interpretation of the fable pretends it is prophecy; that is, the religious dimension is implicit in the poem:

Say, who is to be understood,
By that old Thief Prometheus? WOOD.
For Jove, it is not hard to guess him,
I mean his [Majesty], God bless him. (346)

The relationship of subject to King is analogous to the relationship of man to God; and the man who subverts the one relationship is the equivalent of the Being who subverts the other. Here again, the eternal world gives significance to the temporal. The temporal order, ideally, should symbolise and imitate the eternal -- and it always does, even in its chaos.

Swift's attacks on Marlborough, the Calves' Head Club, on Godolphin, and on Wood seem to destroy the very basis of political action. It seems that no matter what is done, politics will always suffer the peril of subversion by the forces of evil, and that therefore, since no man willingly exposes himself to temptation, the reasonable man will stay out of politics. But Swift thought himself a reasonable man and not only did not stay out of politics but got into it as far and

as deep as he could. The implication is clear: political action is always personal, and the responsibility for the action rests with the individual. He may be a morally myopic man such as Marlborough; he may be a devotee of idolatrous partisanship such as the members of the Calve's Head Club are; or he may be a temporal instrument of the source of all evil, such as the magician Sid Hamet. In each of these cases, the ethical principles governing political action depend on an illusory or mistaken apprehension of the moral facts of the world: they depend on evil. That evil has its source in a person, in Satan.

But it must not be thought that Swift felt that political action inevitably proceeded from the devil; he was no romantic in politics. Quite the contrary; as we have argued above, it is because political action is a necessary form of human action, and because it requires the exercise of free choice, that it is of vital importance, first, that the individual engage in it; and second, that he base his action on a sound ethic, that he derive reasons for polity from a true and complete recognition of the moral law. That recognition is recognition of the good. The good also proceeds from a person, from God. The statesman whose character is essentially good, whose political choices are guided by moral principles,

that statesman is truly great. The others are at best -- important. Murry, who has made a remarkably thorough study of Swift's early poetry,²³ sees enunciated in it the positive principles of Swift's theory of greatness. The Pindaric Odes are all odes of praise, and they all have one theme in common: that the men praised are worthy of praise because they are good as well as great in the worldly sense. There is the essence of Swift's vision of man: a creature not merely political, and not merely religious, but both.

CHAPTER FOUR: WOOD'S HALFPENCE: THE POLITICIAN IN ACTION

I

Despite the impression the last chapter makes, few of Swift's political verses are very much concerned with their targets' misapprehension of the true relationship between private morality and public responsibility. For the most part, Swift was content to attack the practical effects of that misapprehension. One reason for the limited attack that Swift favored is suggested by Herbert Davis: "Most frequently Swift's poetry was prompted entirely from without."¹ Occasional poetry rarely concerns itself with the principles that justify its response to the occasion; so Swift in his occasional political verses eschews expression of the beliefs he acted on. Metaphysical evil makes an excellent subject for the generalised satires of the Elegy on Marlborough, or of "Toland's Invitation to Dismal." But practical evil, the inevitable consequence of metaphysical evil, is in itself sufficient cause to attack the perpetrator, and there is no necessity (though there is opportunity) to ridicule the perpetrator's metaphysic. The satirist may be fully aware of the delusion whose practical effects he attacks, but usually his awareness will remain on the level of implicit assumption

within the poem. The subject of the occasional satire will therefore be a specific instance of evil, and the recipient of the satiric lashes will be a particular evil-doer. The attack will be personal, direct, and violent. The affair of Wood's halfpence occasioned a lot of verse by Swift, and by his imitators, and all of it is interesting as an example of direct attack.

Ireland had for several generations suffered from insufficient and debased currency, partly because of the restrictive laws governing its trade, and partly because of the practice of granting patents to private individuals for the minting of coins.² About 1720 the shortage of coins became acute, as it had done before; and the remedy was the same as had been applied before. The English government, without consulting the Irish Parliament, granted a patent to one William Wood, iron-monger and mine-owner, authorising him to mint not more than three hundred and sixty tons of good, pure copper into halfpence and farthings. (There is a rumor, which I have not been able to confirm, that the patent was originally issued to the King's mistress, the Duchess of Kendall, who thereupon sold it to Wood at a profit of several tens of thousands of pounds). The value of three hundred and sixty tons of good copper was then about £60,000; the patent set the

value of the coins at £100,800. It seems that Wood's profit was assured, and large. The danger of debased currency was real, though not very great; more important was the English indifference to the rights of Ireland as a sovereign nation owing allegiance only to the King of England. Most irritating of all was Wood's stupid arrogance. Feeling safe behind his royal patent, he "was soon talking of pouring his money down the throats of the people if they would not accept it."³ All these factors combined to arouse Swift's fighting instincts. In his Drapier's Letters he first concentrated Irish resentment on Wood himself, and then broadened the issue to include the whole question of Irish-English relationships, a question that was not to be settled for another two centuries, and then in a way Swift would not have liked. What the Drapier's Letters did in that affair is well known, and their form, aim, and effect have been often and ably investigated.⁴ Swift's poems on the occasion seem to have been neglected. Quintana does mention most of them, and quotes pieces he likes, but he does not see them as anything more than good examples of topical satire and temporarily useful insult.⁵ But the poems were more than this. They also argued the case for Irish liberty, they also presented a theory of political freedom and political obligations, as the Drapier's Letters did;

and where the prose used polemical exhortation and bizarre logic to achieve its ends, the poetry used pun, symbolism, and sarcastic irony. Some of the poems were in response to specific occasions: for instance, an epigram turning a witty compliment to Lord Carteret on the notion that the sounds of his welcome were drowned out by the clink of Wood's coin. "Verses on an Upright Judge" and "Whitshed's Motto on his Coach" are violent sarcasms occasioned by Whitshed's behavior at the trial of Harding, printer of the Drapier's Letters. Other poems, those on Wood especially, which describe him as tinker, insect, and assorted types of scoundrel, were written to keep the issue alive. While the effect of the poetry as distinct from the prose is of course difficult to judge, it must have been great. In an age that had invented the newspaper, that had rediscovered satiric comedy, but not the satiric review, broadside of scurrilous verse were virtually the only means of expressing and encouraging those attitudes and feelings for which the prose "letters" provided the more or less rational argument.

Swift's poems on the affair of Wood's halfpence are as witty, intense, and pointedly satiric as any he wrote. For our purposes, two things about them are of interest. The one is the curiously playful tone, employed as if it were hardly worth the effort to be really serious about the

business; the other is the strong implication everywhere that the charges against Wood and all those on his side were based on moral principles as well as economic and political ones. What those principles were, we have seen in the previous chapter; but that playfulness is new, or, rather, it is new that the playfulness of the wit should set the tone of the poetry.

The play of wit is very apparent in the epigram mentioned above. Here it is:

CART'RET was welcomed to the Shore
First with the brazen Cannon's Roar,
To meet him next, the Soldier comes,
With brazen Trumps, and brazen Drums.
Approaching near the Town, he hears,
The brazen Bells salute his Ears:
But when Wood's Brass began to Sound
Guns, Trumpets, Drums, and Bells were drown'd.

(338)

Perhaps "playfulness" is less apt a term than "elegance" to apply to this piece. Its formal qualities are signs of perfect craftsmanship; for example, the repeated use of "brazen" which finally modulates to "Brass"; or the astonishing assonance and alliteration of the last line, and the progressive salutes, which give the effect of Carteret's progress from harbor to town. The elegance of the craft almost makes the squib at Wood & Co. a mere aside as if they were hardly worth the trouble of attack. The style demands more attention than the content.

The same kind of ironic underestimation of the victim,

coupled with emphasis on the wit rather than the substance of the attack, we find in the "Verses on an Upright Judge," though the wit is more acid, and its effect more violent. The second of these verses will serve for them all:

In Church your Grandsire cut his Throat;⁶
To do the Jobb too long he tarry'd,
He would have had my hearty Vote,
To cut his Throat before he marry'd. (349)

The grim irony of that quatrain is of the kind found today in "sick" jokes. We might note too, that a good deal of the effect depends on the caesura after "Throat" in the last line, a caesura lengthened by the rhyme with "Vote," and thus generating suspense. Even here, Swift was careful to work the verse into proper shape.

In the "Quibbling Elegy on Judge Boat," written a few years earlier, we find a thorough enjoyment of punning, even of the most outrageous kind, and an utter disregard for the victim. Attack on a man's actions and character implies a personal interest of a kind in that man; but to use a man's name as material for a series of fantastic puns reduces him to the level of mere instrument. Neither he nor his name can be taken seriously; and in consequence, his actions, and the principles he stands for, are forgotten. The reader is distracted by the puns, and his distraction is no doubt the effect Swift aimed for. This technique of diverting the reader's

attention is one of Swift's favorites in the Wood affair. Again and again he refuses to take the threat of the debased currency seriously, but instead earnestly computes the cost to Wood if the ironmonger were to carry out his threat of forcing the Irish to eat his coinage if they will not use it; or solemnly draws a fabulous comparison between Wood and various wood-boring insects; or concocts a series of quibbles on his name.⁷

The playfulness of the wit, the callousness of the humor, its complete disregard of anything except its own effectiveness, provide, I think, strong evidence of the utter contempt Swift felt for his victims. They seem to be hardly more than an excuse for the exercise of his wit. Only in the poems on Whitshed, the upright judge, does Swift display his true hatred of the man, or the true range of his power. Of all the officers of state, the corrupt judge is the worst. The crudity of such an individual's conception of justice can be countered only by crudely violent satire. The epigram quoted above is about as crudely ferocious as it could be. The satire pleases, if that is the word, not by the justness or aptness of its attack (it is too destructive to be either just or apt) but by the contempt implicit in its hatred. "The Day of Judgment" is a good comment on Swift's attitude

here, even though it has no direct connection with the Wood affair. Jove damns mankind in words of majestically just anger -- and then dismisses the condemned and fearful multitude with the words "Go, go, you're bit!"⁸

But in one poem on Whitshed we find the whole range of Swift's attitudes. "Whitshed's Motto on his Coach" is worth quoting in full, and short enough.

LIBERTAS & natale solum;
 Fine Words; I wonder where you stole 'um.
 Could nothing but thy chief Reproach,
 Serve as a Motto on thy Coach?

But, let me now the Words translate:
Natale solum, My Estate:
 My dear Estate, how well I love it;
 My Tenants, if you doubt will prove it:
 They swear I am so kind and good,
 I hug them till I squeeze their Blood.

LIBERTAS bears a large Import:
 First, how to swagger in a Court;
 And, secondly, to shew my Fury,
 Against an uncomplying Jury:
 And, Thirdly, 'tis a new Invention,
 To favour Wood and keep my Pension:
 And, Fourthly: 'tis to play an odd Trick,
 Get the Great Seal, and turn out Brod'rick.
 And, Fifthly; you know whom I mean,
 To humble that vexatious Dean.
 And, Sixthly; for my Soul, to barter it
 For Fifty Times its Worth, to Carteret.

Now since your Motto thus you construe,
 I must confess you've spoken once true,
Libertas & natale solum;
 You had good Reason when you stole 'um. (p. 348)

We find here the same kind of irony as in the "Elegy" on Marlborough. Just as Marlborough made widows and orphans in his

lifetime, so Whitshed loves his tenants killingly. The judge's love of his estate is sheer idolatry; there is something repellent in "My dear Estate, how well I love it." Whitshed, like Marlborough, is corrupted by greed. Like the members of the Calve's Head Club, he is possessed of the devil. The long list of not liberties but licences shows this, perhaps the most powerful evidence being the double irony of selling his soul for fifty times its worth. The poem actually ends there; the last four lines merely emphasize its theme, which is that Whitshed's values are exactly inverted. That reminder is hardly noticed as the full impact of the sixth liberty strikes home. Swift's use of paradox is often reminiscent of Donne's: it is a means of irony.

Besides the grim irony, we find the same callousness observed earlier in the "Elegy" on Marlborough. This, I think, is what M. Johnson hunted for in his "Sin of Wit." The callousness is the sin of the wit. It appears here most strongly in two places:

They swear I am so kind and good,
I hug them till I squeeze their Blood.

And, Sixthly, for my Soul, to barter it,
For Fifty Times its Worth, to Carteret.

In both these images, something gets in the way of the meaning. In the first, it is again that "sick" quality (in fact, the

idea is used in jokes about the affection of vampires, and so on); it is the quality found in Hieronimus Bosch's Garden of Delights, where the homiletic power of the painting is swamped in the fascination of the bizarre and horrible detail. In the second of the two couplets quoted above, the thought contorts itself so agilely into ironic paradox, that we watch the contortion rather than the result.

Further, the whole interpretation of Whitshed's motto is an exercise, a performance; and that fact divides our attention between the cause of the attack and its means. The cause is Whitshed's insensitivity to the meaning of his motto, that is, it is his corrupt behavior. His motto would offend Swift in particular, because for Swift the motto expresses one the highest worldly ideals. His interpretation of the motto simply inverts its implications, and hence stresses Whitshed's moral degradation. He has no patriotism, but an idolatrous love of his estate, and will do anything to expand and keep it. He has no sense of liberty, for that implies a respect for the liberties of others; instead, libertas is a license to indulge his passions: his avarice, his vanity, and his ambition. Worst of all, Whitshed takes libertas to include the power of disposition over his soul. The whole irony begins and ends in religious terms: Whitshed begins in idolatry and ends in

pride. His delusion has completely perverted his values.

These three elements, -- the ironic parody of attitudes, the play on words and ideas, and the ethics justifying the satire, -- between them generate the themes of the political poems. These themes are all more or less particularised applications of several principles. The first is that political corruption has its source in the corruption of man's moral being, for political responsibility is only a form of each man's personal responsibility to his god. The second is that greatness without goodness deserves contempt, is in fact beneath contempt, for by denying his personal responsibility for his actions or by accepting the deluder's account of that responsibility, the corrupt politician has renounced his claim on humanity. And last, but not least, corruption and delusion are the ethical and metaphysical instances of the same fact of evil.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE CASE AGAINST POETRY

I

In his remarkable essay on "Swift's View of Poetry," valuable particularly for its firm relating of Swift's verse to the English tradition in poetry, Herbert Davis says that Swift is "the most extreme example that we have ever had in England of reaction against the heroic or romantic view of the poet's function and art."¹ Davis goes on to elaborate two points: the first is that Swift had no belief in any kind of inspiration or "enthusiasm," and hence constantly attacked the notion that poetic inspiration gives a special value to the poet's utterances; and the second is that in his verse (even in the odes of the "pindaric aberration") Swift "never courted the Muse, but turned instead to the laughing and irrepressible demon of satire, always ready at his elbow to use anything or anybody for its own disreputable purpose."²

I think Davis' points are well-taken. Swift did, throughout his life, object to poetic cant, stock similes, standardised eulogy, poetic professionalism, and so on. He was a devotee to or victim of the comic spirit, a spirit marked, as Murry says, by "the idea of world-annihilation," by the attitude that "any cosmos is an illusion to be

shattered."³ But Davis' comparison of Pope the "high-priest" of the cult of poetry with Swift the sceptical unbeliever dangerously exaggerates a difference. For Swift's satire was always directed against the means and uses, or rather abuses, of poetry. He never attacked poetry as such; in fact, analysis of the grounds on which he bases his attack on the abuses of poetry will show that his ideal of the function of poetry is as lofty as Pope's, and in some respects goes beyond romanticism. True, he never specifically arrogates the prophetic function to the poetic, but he does, as we have seen,⁴ add a dimension to his poetry that is in essence religious, and insofar as he treats the origins of evil, he prophesies. He has no use for romantic flatteries, or pastoral elegies, or heroic eulogies; but he considers poetry a fit vehicle for the praise of virtue, and he used it so.⁴ He accuses the Grub-Street hacks of churning out falsehoods; but his own verse, he claims, is truthful. He dislikes artifice in verse and imitates technical tricks only to parody them; but he rewrote and reworked his poetry as much as most poets, and his best verses are as finely wrought as anyone's. He never aspired to fame as a poet, but almost all his verses are, or contain, parodies of the traditions he disclaimed; and he could as little refrain from ridiculing the hacks at every

opportunity as he could restrain himself from satirising the corrupt great ones whenever they gave him a chance.

After politics, poetry was his greatest passion. The very fact that he wrote so much verse proves this: whether "poet's Vein or Scribbler's Itch" made him write, make him write it did, and there were few years in his life when he wrote nothing.⁶ His correspondence abounds in references to his verse,--so much so, that it often forms the authority for including a poem in the canon or assigning it to a certain date. When he had nothing else to do, he wrote poetry.⁷ His "Ode to Sir William Temple" ends with the complaint that

In vain to quench this foolish Fire I try
In Wisdom and Philosophy;
In vain all wholesome Herbs I sow,
Where nought but Weeds will grow.
Whate'er I plant (like Corn on barren Earth)
By an equivocal Birth
Seeds and runs up to Poetry. (33)

Every one of Swift's early odes reflects Swift's struggle with his Muse. They either end with a complaint much like the one quoted, or change the subject from praise of the person addressed to the contemplation of the problems of poetry. Even though, as he claimed in the ode "Occasioned by Sir William Temple's Late Illness and Recovery,"⁸ he renounced the Muse's "visionary power" and "with a puff the whole Delusion" ended, the Muse would not renounce him. For Swift

made a mistake: a poet, as Graves insists, does not possess the White Goddess; she possesses him. And it makes little difference to her whether the poet thinks of her or of the beauty and power of his art; for she is the art she inspires. Swift renounced conscious allegiance to the poet's creed, but he was preoccupied with his craft, its technique and function, as only a poet can be, and was jealous of the abuse of poetry as only a lover of the White Goddess ever is. Swift was a poet. He had an ideal conception of the nature of his art, and believed he used it right while most poets abused it. Most importantly, his thought cannot be expressed except in the metaphors he shaped for its expression: to attempt the use of other images than his is to distort his meaning. Swift is the kind of writer that is impossible to translate into the ordinary language: at best, he can be approximated.

Having praised the pudding, we must eat it. What did Swift think poetry was and was not? What were its possible, and what its desirable, effects? And why did he satirise poets and poetry with almost the ferocity and more of the contempt he used on fools and politicians? To these and other questions this chapter will give a more or less direct answer.

II

Two of Swift's most-praised pieces are "A Description of the Morning" and "A Description of a City Shower." Swift was proud of both these contributions to the Tatler,⁹ as well he might be: Dr. Johnson notwithstanding, there is plenty here for the critic to exercise his powers on.

Professor Quintana says of these pieces that they are "anti-poetry from beginning to end."¹⁰ Assuming that he means what I think he means (what is anti-poetry?), we must agree to the justness of the remark, but note that there is more than parody of a tradition involved here. We must ask what that tradition is, what conventions it uses, what themes it expresses, and whether Swift satirised the tradition or its abuse.

A brief comment on the contrast between the Classic and Romantic views of "the poet's function and art" is convenient here. It seems to me that the two aesthetics embody the same values; they quarrel only about their order. For the Classicist, truth is the primary criterion of beauty; for the Romantic, beauty defines truth. Nietzsche used the terms Apollonian and Dionysian: the one brings with it associations of cool, detached intellect, the other of warm, passionate emotion; the one, formal excellence and expressiveness, the

other, striking content and effectiveness. Truth is a function of language, as the logicians, who study truthful utterance, never tire of reminding us. But logic deals only with forms, not with content, for it is the form of the argument that determines its validity. That is, form and content are in principle separable; hence, the Augustans felt no contradiction in Pope's definition of excellent poetry: "what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed." For the Romantic, that phrase is heresy: each expression is unique; form can never be separate from content.

Translating these contrasting propositions into sentences dealing with our subject, we get the following. For a Classicist, a form of poetry may be more suitable for one kind of subject than another, but any subject and any form can be combined; all that changes is the effect, or meaning of the poem, but it remains a poem.¹¹ For the Romantic, that is impossible. Not only can certain forms and contents never be combined, but an attempt to do so is bound to fail: the product would not be poetry, but something else ("anti-poetry" perhaps). Moreover, because of the indissoluble union of form and content, there are some subjects and themes that can not be made into poetry, for poetry is a specialised form of speech. (Such subjects and themes might be the ones Swift uses.)

The practical effects of the two aesthetics are interesting. The "didactic" eighteenth century, that ought to value a poem according to the value of its teaching, turns out to value technical qualities above ethical ones when judging the merit of a poem; for judging its effects on the ethics of a reader is another problem entirely. Dr. Johnson continually praises such writers as Gay or Congreve for their aesthetic qualities, and censures them for their morals. By contrast, the Romantics, who ought to value a poem only for its beauty, turn out to be the most moralistic critics of all. In the Romantic aesthetic, the aesthetic value of a poem can be determined only by its theme and subject, for form must follow content, and hence all poems are successful. However, theme and subject can be judged only ethically, if at all; so that the concept of proper themes for poetry, and of proper poetic subjects, develops furthest in the nineteenth century. Even today, there are many people who argue that Neo-classic poetry is not "really" poetry. We still tend to judge a work by its theme and subject; and we accuse a writer of failure more often than not because his "execution" does not mold his theme to our liking. We have a distaste still for the eighteenth-century criticism in terms of rules and merely technical standards.

However, by the "merely" technical standards of the eighteenth century, "A Description of the Morning" is as nearly perfect a piece of verse as we are likely to find; and after analysis of its theme and subject, they may be found worth a poet's effort after all.

Morning is a process, the change from night to day.¹² Swift does not say that morning is a process: he shows it. To begin with the most technical: the tenses progress from pluperfect through past to present, and the several reversals of the progress serve not just to create variety, but to indicate the inevitability of the change:

Duns at his Lordships Gate began to meet,
And Brickdust Moll had Screamed through half the Street.

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The sudden pluperfect in the line about Moll produces a sense of urgency, for if she is not brought into the poem now, the irreversible flow of time will not allow us go back to include her later; as it is, she has just barely made it.

The imagery also progresses. It imitates rather than describes the morning. Swift begins with a few details of the passing nightlife, then sketches the earliest of domestic and commercial activities, and leaves us expectant of the proper business of the day. To avoid monotony and to suggest the tension and movement of change, Swift gives us no simply

progressive list, but rather past and present facts simultaneously. The tension of the simultaneous presentation of past and present impresses itself as the passage of Time.

We may note further the skilful use of people, sight, and sound to sketch the action. The diction is remarkably generalised: the people mentioned are not even types, but symbols of their classes, and only their actions are typical. But the cries of the trades (and the three mentioned seem a multitude!¹³); the inferences suggested by "slipshod 'Prentice," "Dext'rous Airs," "watchful Bailiffs," and so on; the references to both night and day ("Duly let out a Nights," "The Kennel Edge where Wheels had worn the place") -- all these images counteract the effect of generalised diction and generalised names to create more of the tension that suggests change and life.

As a piece of descriptive or "objective" poetry, Swift's piece has few equals. The Romantic's descriptions of nature are vaguer, and his precursors such as Thomson were not conscious enough of the form inherent in their work to achieve the same immediacy as Swift, in whose poem generality and parody by their conflict heighten awareness of what is actually being said. It is the neutrality of the speaker that most strongly suggests the generality of the poem, despite

the prefatory assurances in the Tatler that the writer describes only and exactly what he sees. But the writer's deliberate placing of himself outside and independent of the poem is no more than the approved eighteenth century stance. The stance creates an irony; in this case the irony derives from the reader's knowledge of the pastoral convention. This knowledge the speaker apparently shares, but he hopes to counteract the falsity of the pastoral by the truth of his own convention. The subject of the poem, its imagery, and its feeling are not pastoral at all; they are urban. Granted that Swift does not share his speaker's naivete in the use of poetic conventions, we have established only that "A Description of the Morning" is a parody, but that we knew before.

We need to examine the extent of the parody. The pastoral conventions, whatever else they celebrate, all celebrate the ascendancy of day over night, of good over evil; this celebration, where it is not the major purpose of the poem, is normally used as counterpoint to the main theme. Night is represented in retreat, and Day in conquest, with Nature preparing herself for Day's approach and greeting him with joyful song. Birds, shepherds, shepherdesses, and other natural beings are presented as the subjects for whose allegiance Night and Day have been fighting. The pastoral convention

provides a ready-made and powerful symbolism of rebirth, salvation, the new Eden, and so on; this is why Milton, for example, chose the pastoral form for his "Hymn on the Morning of Nativity."

Pastoral symbolism can be directly translated from the rural into the urban setting. As the birth of Christ is the Biblical prototype of the rural form, so his entrance into Jerusalem is the prototype of the urban: Christ the Shepherd is Christ the King; the pasture is the city, the flock, its inhabitants, and the New Eden (at least in the mind of the mob) the New Jerusalem. Swift, in choosing a city-street for his setting, not only parodies the New Jerusalem, he plays it off against its rural analogue. The parody presents all the conventional patterns of pastoral symbolism. The occasional Hackney-Coach and the unfortunate Betty represent the retreating forces of Night. The busily cleaning and scrubbing maids and 'prentices represent the preparation to receive Day, the new king. The cries of the chimney-sweep, the small-coal man, and Brick-dust Moll parallel the welcoming chorus of the birds. So far, so good, for the absurdity of the last parallel could be overcome. The poem could still honestly celebrate the purity of the liberated proletariat and the enlightened justice of their rulers. But the speaker, Isaac Bickerstaff's cousin

from the country, reports exactly what he sees:

The Turnkey now his Flock returning sees,
Duly let out a Nights to steal for Fees.
The watchful Bailiffs take their silent Stands,
And Schoolboys lag with Satchels in their Hands.

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These are the symbols of Justice, Law, and Enlightenment; their presence here constitutes the praise of Day, under whose rule they subsist.

The irony of the parody and its satiric intent are clear enough. But before we mention the ethical and social themes of the poem, let us consider its aesthetics. By convention, the pastoral deals with the beautiful, good, and true things. When used as Milton used it, the convention permits a powerfully mythic celebration of the final triumph of Good over Evil. I stress the mythic element because it demands that the conventional symbols be interpreted in terms of a particular person before they have meaning for that person. But when the pastoral is used simply as a vehicle for flattery, or as an object of amusement, however sophisticated, or as an opportunity for literary exercise, then whatever power the form has to convey a truth is weakened and may be entirely lost. Apparently, Swift thought the pastoral had been in fact weakened, if indeed all poetry had not been weakened equally. Verse had become a carrier of romantic and

heroic untruths instead of the insights into the nature and meaning of the (human) world it had originally carried. Swift demonstrates the form is indeed capable of communicating a truth. That his demonstration uses as unpalatable truth as he dare display in the Tatler is simply evidence of his satiric intent.¹⁴ On the aesthetic level, the satire is aimed at the misuse of poetry. Poetry is not, or should not be, a means of flattery, an object of entertainment alone, or an opportunity for exercise: at any rate, not poetry of the caliber of the pastoral, whose complex and well-wrought form enables it to carry great meaning.

Just how much meaning the form can carry is evident when we consider the judgment on morality, law, and society that Swift delivers in the "Description of the Morning." It is the same judgment that has been discussed earlier: law is corrupt, and justice nonexistent; society consists of wolves, and the highest in the land are more evil than the lowest, for they of all people should know better; and the race of mankind prefers the illusion of its own worth over any truth about its own state, however salutary. The summary theme of the poem is simple enough: Man is a degenerate being, and each new day that dawns shows only the extent of his degeneration. The city street stands in ironic contrast to the New Jerusalem it parodies.

"A Description of the Morning" contains Swift's major themes as we have discussed them in the previous chapters. It also contains an aesthetic, or rather, demonstrates it. In other poems Swift explicitly states the terms of his aesthetic. To other poems we now turn.

III

Swift's satire against the abuses of poetry has two themes, congruent with the two themes of his satire on man. On the one hand, Swift attacks the use of poetry to express and celebrate illusory ideals; on the other, he inveighs against using the poetic gift to flatter, cajole, and mislead the public, the mob and its rulers. Implicit in both attacks is a knowledge of the propagandistic powers of poetry, a power Swift himself knew well how to use, as we have seen; so that his attack on the abuses of poetry is Swift's defense of poesie, his championship of truth. It should be noted that all his verse-satires simultaneously with their satire on moral and social evils contain implicit satires on the abuse of poetry, for all his satires are parodies of one kind or another.

In "Apollo's Edict," "On Poetry: A Rhapsody," and "Directions for a Birthday Song," Swift expresses his dislike for cant phrase and stock metaphor. "Apollo's Edict" takes as

its occasion an exchange of compliments between the Dean and his friends. Delany had written "News from Parnassus"¹⁵ which tells of a convention summoned by Apollo to install a new vice-regent in Ireland. Delany makes Apollo repeat several of Swift's common charges against the versifiers, and end by proclaiming Swift his viceroy. Swift took his office seriously enough: "Apollo's Edict" is the first act of his reign. In it he forbids the use of "poetic diction"; Wordsworth had a forerunner:

No Simile shall be begun
 With rising or with setting Sun:
 And let the secret Head of Nile
 Be ever banished from your Isle.
 When wretched Lovers live on Air,
 I'll beg you'll the Camelion spare.
 And when you'd make an Heroe grander
 Forget he's like a Salamander. (270)

The list of injunctions continues in this vein for forty-odd lines; then Swift warns against imitating even just comparisons: "With Women Compounds I am cloy'd, / Which only pleased in Biddy Floyd" (272). The poem ends with a compliment to Catherine, Countess of Donegal.

There are two reasons for bewareing of stock comparisons. The first is boredom: even the graceful and just verses on Biddy Floyd will lose their value if too much imitated. The other reason is implicit in Swift's allusion to his own poem on Lord Cutts:¹⁶ the comparison, not being the result of

the author's own perception and thought, will almost certainly be false or meaningless, and may well turn into irony when it is least expected. In any case, it will betray laziness and lack of precision. Both these reasons can be seen as expressions of a more inclusive one: a metaphor should convey a truth or insight that was not perceived before, for "to make new things familiar, and familiar things new"¹⁷ is one of the powers of the poet. That power cannot be exercised without the correlative power of originality.

As with some other of Swift's pieces, it is difficult to decide exactly how seriously to take the rules Swift promulgates in "Apollo's Edict." There is too much wit for the solemnity suitable to such a weighty piece of aesthetic legislation. But Swift did not always use his wit for irony. In his letter "On Corruptions of Style,"¹⁸ Swift's strictures are intended to be taken at face value. But the wit and urbanity of the style, the skill of direct and indirect (or alluding) parody, as well as the real indignation at the destruction of language by thoughtless writers and speakers, get in the way of solemnity. Swift could never be earnest, even when he was in earnest.

For the most part, Swift's ridicule of style is bantering and harmless enough; most stylistic horrors are the result of ignorance and a pathetic vanity, both marks of a

kind of fool. One cannot really hate a fool, however much one is irritated by him, or however much one despises him. But when we come to the attacks on time-serving poets, we find some of Swift's familiar ferocity. "Directions for a Birthday Song" castigates all those who abuse the art of poetry to flatter and cajole the great ones of the world into granting favors, by lying about the hoped-for patron's virtues and actions. The date of the poem is October 30, 1729, which was George II's birthday. The poem satirises Laurence Eusden, who as poet laureate composed birthday odes for the King from 1719 to 1730. Swift addressed his poem to Matthew Pilkington, a parson who hoped for worldly favor and was writing a birthday ode for the King to that end. Swift later disowned the Pilkingtons, even, says Williams, going "so far as to erase Pilkington's name from old letters."¹⁹

To make a birthday ode, directs Swift,

Take twenty Gods of Rome and Greece,
Whose Godships are in chief request,
And fit your present subject best.
And should it be your Hero's case
To have both male and female Race,
Your bus'ness must be to provide
A score of Goddesses beside. (460)

Then he proceeds to demonstrate how to interpret the allusions in such a way as to be most flattering to the subject. In this case, the subject is George II; and by turns the mythological allusions are made ironically true or flatly false. If

making him a son of Saturn might bear an embarrassing interpretation, why, make him a son of Jove, and say that this god visited his mother in the usual manner: "it may be literally true." It may indeed; George II's mother was accused of adultery, and confined to the castle of Ahlden in consequence.²⁰ Well then, press on: make the King a son of Mars, though England has not been at war since before his reign; make him another Apollo, though he is dull and stupid; make him a cousin of Neptune, though English sea-power is sadly diminished; in short, lie, and lie, and then lie again.

Following these ten easy lessons on how to flatter a king, Swift satirises the eulogist, by giving him typically exact but not quite believable directions:

'Tis not deny'd that when we write,
Our Ink is black, our Paper white;
And when we scrawl our Paper o'r'e,
We blacken what was white before.
I think this Practise only fit
For dealers in Satyrick Wit:
But you some whitelead ink must get,
And write on paper black as Jet:
Your Int'rest lyes to learn the knack
Of whitening what before was black.

(463-464)

From here on, the irony tightens, the satire bites deeper, and the attack broadens. The poem ends in a mixture of irritation and contempt, overlain still by a tone of mock-earnestness, and finishes with the instructions of any recipe, "bake and serve":

Supposing now your Song is done,
To Minheer Hendel next you run,
Who artfully will pare and prune
Your words to some Italian Tune.
Then print it in the largest letter,
With Capitals, the more the better.

Present it boldly on your knee,
And take a Guinea for your Fees.

(469)

If anything about Swift's view of poetry can be derived from this recipe for a cant poem, I do not think it is that Swift did not believe in what Davis calls "heroic" poetry. In this poem Swift has a double target, corrupt kings and corrupt poems; for the satire on corrupt monarchy is a side-effect of the satire on corrupt versifying. Swift's grounds for anger are not that heroic verse lauding the virtues and accomplishments of good and great men is silly stuff, but that its abuse is evil. To praise kings for virtues they do not possess confirms them in their corruptions, for poetry even when factually false is emotionally very persuasive, and heroic eulogy conveys emotions of adulation, respect, and admiration. The recipient of the flattery feels himself approved, even if he knows that the approval is insincere; and that feeling is hardly conducive to repentance and betterment. The flatterer's victim persists in and enlarges his illusion of his own worth; and the flatterer, and his hearers, may come to believe his lies.

We are back to Swift's preoccupation with the metaphysics of evil, and we see that his satire on poetry is of a piece with his satires of private and public corruption. Poetry, when corrupted, provides and confirms the illusions that men make themselves the victims of, so that poetry, far from being divine in its essence, can be demonic in its effects. This is the core of Swift's disagreement with all those who hold "the romantic or heroic view of the poet's function and art."²¹ That view is perhaps better characterised as the professional one, for Pope and Wordsworth both subscribe to it; their only disagreement occurs on the lower level of formal and affective values.

But if Swift does not believe in the inherently sacramental or prophetic powers of poetry, he does believe that poetry can be used to good, and even high, purpose. Murry, in his chapter on Swift's "hero-worship,"²² notes that the early odes embody Swift's view of poetry. It is characteristically a classic one. Poetry's highest purpose is to preserve and celebrate the memories of men renowned for their virtue.²³ This was Swift's purpose in writing those early odes. The delusion he ends with a puff is the one that virtue could be praised in a vicious world. That world could neither understand nor offer examples of virtue, which for Swift included not only moral but also literary and political

excellence.

If praise of virtue is poetry's chief use, there is another, complementary, one. This is the exposure and punishment of vice. That is, the Muse and the satiric Demon are both patrons of poetry. Together they ensure the poet's ability to reveal truth, to prophesy.

Poetry has further, secondary, capabilities, all of them consequences of its primary ones. Poetry can honor friends, and it can give form and beauty to the ceremonies of human relationship. Most of Swift's verse was of this latter kind, for while "most poets use verse where prose would not be good enough for their purpose, Swift seems almost to have used it as a more familiar, a more intimate way of communication."²⁴ He, and his friends, called such verses "trifles." But they are trifles only relative to the greater powers of poetry. They can be, and often are, perfect examples of craft, and can and do persuade the truth which their makers perceived in their occasion.

IV

It may be urged that I have argued negatively, that the aesthetic I have outlined is the conclusion of a backward argument, and that there is little in Swift to justify a positive aesthetic. F.R. Leavis argues that Swift presents

himself only in negative terms.²⁵ But this position is the result of Leavis' failure to distinguish between the destructive strategy of satire and the positive principles that justify it. Satire is a war, and like all wars it destroys and does not directly create; but the hope, albeit pious, is always that what is destroyed will be rebuilt, or will be replaced by something better. Swift does, however, indicate his positive principles in a penetrable disguise from time to time. One such exhibition is the "Letter of Advice to a Young Poet,"²⁶ and another is "On Poetry: a Rhapsody."

The Letter employs the same subterfuge Swift had used earlier in the Argument against the Abolishment of Christianity: he advises the poet only to adopt the appropriate behavior or appearance. When Swift mentions the essential qualities of the poet and his art, it is to warn the young man against them, as being a hindrance to the business of poetry.²⁷ The advice is to be a nominal poet only.

The "Rhapsody on Poetry" is partly a versification of the Letter, and partly an anatomy of poetry, of critics, and, by extension, of the "human conditions."²⁸ It consists of a number of distinct sections which Swift did not try to stitch together very firmly. The poem begins with a very general consideration of the folly of man, proceeds to the folly of poets, and continues with counsels to the aspiring poet, hack,

and critic. A description of the social arrangements of the commonwealth of poets follows, and an invective against the use of poetry to flatter kings, together with samples of such poetry, ends the composition. The plan, such as it is, organises the smaller themes into two large groups. The first deals with the poet, the second with poetry. Some of these themes we have already discussed; we will consider in detail what implications can be found in Swift's image of the poet and his place in the world; and what metaphysical notions are contained in the description of the hierarchy of poets.

The poem begins with an ancient image of man's perversity. All animals conform to their own nature, and attempt nothing in conflict with it;

But Man we find the only Creature,
Who, led by Folly, fights with Nature;
Who, when she loudly cries, Forebear,
With Obstiancy fixes there;
And, where his Genius least inclines,
Absurdly bends his whole Designs. (641)

We then get what seems to be an example of such fighting with nature. No human business, not conquest, nor statecraft, nor scientific endeavor, requires such "heavenly Influence" as poetry. But this heavenly influence is not at all beneficial. No man, no matter how low or disreputable his origin, is so

. . . disqualified by Fate
To rise in Church, in Law, or State,
As he, whom Phebus in his Ire
Hath blasted with poetic Fire. (641)

And nobody wants poetry. There is no law governing its disposition, there is no buyer for it, and no voter either. At one time there was a laureateship, which institution at least acknowledged the existence of the poet, though it hardly enabled it. But since Cibber has that post, the hacks have all the power and recognition. Nevertheless, it seems that the poet still wishes for worldly advancement. Let him try for it; the rhapsodist predicts his fate, and commiserates with him:

Poor starv'ling Bard, how small thy Gains!
How unproportion'd to thy Pains!

And here a Simile comes pat in:
Tho' Chickens take a Month to fatten,
The Guests in less than half an Hour
Will more than half a Score devour.
So, after toiling twenty Days,
To earn a Stock of Pence and Praise,
Thy Labours, grown the Critick's Prey,
Are swallowed o'er a Dish of Tea;
Gone, to be never heard of more,
Gone, where the Chickens went before. (642)

To the world at large, a poem is of no more value, and worth no more effort to assimilate, than a chicken. A poem is worth less than a chicken, in fact, for while the bird's consumption takes a half hour, the poem is dealt with between gulps of tea. But poetry does have a worth all its own, though the world does not, and perhaps cannot, appreciate it. That this inference is the intended one is shown by Swift's previous ironic comment on the unsuitability of the poet to

all worldly office. It is a comment that comes out of his own experience; for his early odes, though sincerely praising their subjects, were designed to make him known. It is precisely in these poems that Swift displays himself a victim of the Muse, and though he never completely renounced the lady -- he wrote almost as many eulogies, compliments, and birthday songs as satires -- he was forever suspicious of her. The Muse could delude the poet into thinking his special perception of truth fitted him not only for fame, but also for power. (It was a Romantic poet who said that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world; Swift would have hooted at that one.)²⁹

But the poet's nature is radically at odds with the ability to gain worldly ends; so if the young man still feels the urge to write (whether that urge is the "poet's Vein, or scribbling Itch" makes little difference after all), let him listen to an "old experienced Sinner's" advice. This advice is sound; and, as it too often happens in Swift, it is difficult to decide whether it is intended ironically or not. It consists of eminently practical stuff: discover your talent, be sure to let it conform to the latest fashion in the typography of allusion, write and rewrite your verses, and so on. A moment's thought will discover that Swift is advising the poet in his trade; he is not in the least interested in whether

the young man is a true poet or not. For a poet, a true poet, does not need advice, he needs encouragement. The advice on how to behave when the poem is shredded by the critics clinches the point: acquiesce in your poem's murder, says Swift, and more:

. . . Praise the Judgment of the Town,
And help yourself to run it down.
Give up your fond paternal Pride,
Nor argue on the weaker Side;
For Poems read without a Name
We justly praise, or justly blame. (644)

But do we? The paragraph ends with a curious reason for this behavior: if it is ever suspected who wrote your poem, says Swift, all the bad verse inflicted on the town will be ascribed to you "Till some fresh Blockhead take your Place." The fact that such a blockhead exists must surely influence the critic's judgment.

The advice proceeds. If your talent does not suffice for the fame of a fashionable poet (and it's clear enough that the less talent the better for that occupation), be a political versifier, "For the vilest Verse thrives best at Court." And if you cannot stomach praising a king for virtues not existent in his person, be a critic. Learn the critic's gestures ("A Nod, a Shrug, a scornful Smile"), his jargon, and a few quotations from Longinus "Translated from Boileau's translation." Ape the current reigning wit at Will's

coffeehouse until your fame eclipses his and you "procure Disciples of your own."

Swift's strategy in this part of the poem is a favorite one. He begins with the innocuous, sensible propositions of an attitude, and, bit by bit, almost imperceptibly reduces that attitude to the absurd, goes beyond that, and ends with the demonic. The advice to the young poet, who might be (who knows?) a future priest of the Muse, leads him step by step into the proud delusion of being himself a semi-divine being, a critic.²⁷

Thus far the advice to the poet. The second part of the poem deals with the polity and metaphysics of the poetic commonwealth. After a brief description of the organisation of poets, or rather hacks, in London, Swift introduces Hobbes' Leviathan to account for the pecking order among poets.

Hobbes clearly proved that ev'ry Creature
Lives in a State of War by Nature.

The Greater for the smallest watch,
But meddle seldom with their Match.

• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •

But search among the rhyming Race,
The Brave are worried by the Base.
If, on Parnassus' Top you sit,
You rarely bite, are always bit:
Each Poet of inferiour Size
On you shall rail and criticise;
And strive to tear you Limb from Limb,
While others do as much for him. (651)

In other words, the natural order of the kingdom of poetry is the exact opposite of Hobbes' natural order of the world. However, there is a class of natural beings among whom the same order prevails as in the poetic kingdom:

The Vermin only tease and pinch
 Their Foes superior by an Inch.
 So, Nat'ralists observe, a Flea
 Hath smaller Fleas that on him prey,
 And these have smaller Fleas to bite 'em,
 And so proceed ad infinitum:
 Thus ev'ry Poet in his Kind,
 Is bit by him that comes behind. . . . (651-2)

If Swift had been concerned only to prove that Grub-Street writers are insects, he would not explicate the image; but he is not yet finished, for the analogy is not yet complete, and the full meaning of the image has not yet been generated.

Swift commiserates with Grub-Street, whose "graceless Children scorn to own thee!" The grubs have become insects, and naturally have forgotten their former existence. ³¹

In his insect image Swift has implied the existence of infinitesimal fleas. He now picks up the idea of the infinitely small again in the difficulty of how "to purchase Fame by writing ill." The conclusion is that

. . . tho' in Nature Depth and Height
 Are equally held infinite,
 In Poetry the Height we know;
 'Tis only infinite below. (653-654)

The hack poet can achieve fame of sorts by mastering the art of sinking. (I am sure that Swift was remembering Pope's contribution to the *Scriblerus* memoirs.) The structure of the natural order of hacks is the reverse of that assumed normal by Hobbes; fame in hack-writing is had by falling to great failure, not by rising to great achievements. These are images embodying the strategy Swift had used earlier in the poem: so the images must be images of perversion. The right and true order of things is upset, and instead of truth we have illusion, instead of good, evil, and instead of beauty, ugliness.

There remains one more perversion to be attacked. Swift uses simple parody; the tone and syntax of his verse charge it with dignity and rhapsodic emotion, but it is rhapsodic rage, not admiration:

O, what Indignity and Shame
To prostitute the Muses Name,
By flatt'ring [Kings] whom Heav'n designed
The Plagues and Scourges of Mankind. (654)

We need not analyse the last section in detail; we have seen its theme in the "Directions for a Birthday Song." Here in the "Rhapsody," Swift moves from simple irony to parody to angry invective against the falsely flatt'ring praises of kings.

The rhapsody "On Poetry" may be accused of formlessness,

for there is no coherent argument developed in the poem. But its three main sections use analogous strategies; in each, some aspect of "the poet's function and art" is examined and is shown to be the precise opposite of what it is usually taken to be. Instead of divine in essence, it is demonic in effect; instead of a natural form of human behavior, it is unnatural and perverse; instead of beautiful, ugly, and instead of true, false.

The poem is a satire. Is it a satire on poetry as such? Can we take it as evidence that Swift did not believe there was such a thing as poetry? Does he here intend to say that all poets are guilty of perverting the art whose abuses he attacks at such length? The answer to all these questions is no, except insofar as the no must be qualified by man's natural habit of perverting everything he sets his hand to. Swift's target moreover is not even the "romantic" or "heroic" poet; for he himself wrote in both attitudes from time to time. It is the professional poet, and professional poetry, that arouses Swift's ire. It is verse written not to preserve and articulate some truth, but to further some political, social, or personal endeavour, to satisfy the demands of power and vanity. Swift's enemy is the poet who prostitutes his talent, who sells his gifts to the highest bidder. His satire is

aimed at "such as make a Business of Poetry (and of such only I speak here for I do not call him a Poet that writes for his Diversion anymore than that Gentleman a Fidler who amuses himself with a Violin). . . ." ³² And since that is a double irony, a gentleman who "writes for his Diversion" is no poet either. What is a poet then? It must be a man who writes neither for pay nor for amusement; and the poetry he writes is neither propaganda nor amusement, even though it may function as such. A poet writes because he must, and what he writes is the truth.

The truths that Swift embodies in his verse are his themes. The single theme that appears in all his poems, either as explicit intention, or as implicit assumption, is the theme of man's deliberate self-delusion. Men willingly accept false images of themselves and their world. They willingly, even eagerly, guide their behavior by incomplete ontologies and inadequate ethics. But when the disillusionment comes, as come it must, men replace one false image by another, for they believe their former vision of the world to have been illusory. But Swift demonstrates that the "Appearance" and the "Reality" with which men replace it are both equally false; and his demonstration implies that for Swift true knowledge of the world, and consequently right behaviour in it, depended less on a classification of conflicting data into "real" and "apparent", than on a resolution of the conflicts.

This epistemological resolution has a moral counterpart: man is made perfect not by the excision of his undesirable qualities, but by their regeneration. Strephon's inability to perceive the beauty of women corresponds exactly to Cassinus' rejection of Celia's defecation; and both Strephon and Cassinus are incapable of the attitude to women expressed by Swift in his compliment to Mrs Biddy Floyd.

But Swift not only expresses a philosophy in his verse, he also demonstrates the real dangers of man's unwillingness to accept and incorporate into their world-image all the data the senses and the imagination afford. He makes clear that Marlborough is damned for his moral stupidity. He shows the inevitability of Strephon's revulsion at the smell of his mistress. He traces Phillis' unalterable course through misery to degradation, a course that begins and ends in ignorance. Swift's concern was the false epistemology and the arrogant certitude of his age's reliance on its own world-view, and all his satires in one way or another question the world-view and condemn the pride of those that hold it with too much certainty.

FOOTNOTES

Introduction

¹ Ball, Swift's Verse; Williams, Swift's Poems.

² For example, Leslie Stephen (Swift, 205-207) mentions only three poems, and wonders whether to call Swift a poet at all. Carl Van Doren (Swift, 242-254) refers to a bare dozen of the poems, and names only three of these in the text (though he names them all in the index). Others, like Stephen Gwynn (The Life and Friendships of Dean Swift) and G.P. Moriarty (Dean Swift and His Writings) assume, somewhat too easily, that Swift's verse is mostly of the light variety and therefore not really poetry; the best they will do for Swift's poetic fame is to approve the humor of such pieces as "Baucis and Philemon." (This is a poem worth reading.) Henry Craik is clearly Stephen's mentor in the matter of Swift's poetry: both ignore the obscene satires entirely, the political satires almost entirely, and make of Swift a writer of purely occasional verse.

³ Johnson, "Life of Swift," Works, XI, 48.

⁴ Hawkesworth, ed., The Works of Jonathan Swift, VIII, 3-4. Compare "A modest Defence of the Lady's Dressing Room," The Prose Works, V, 337-340.

⁵ The critic was willing to admit the invention of a new kind of poetry if necessary; see Dr. Johnson on Gay's Beggar's Opera, Works, X, 246-247.

⁶ Wordsworth, "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," The Poetical Works, II, 387.

⁷ The belief that literature can be distinguished from mere entertainment by its moral qualities is still with us, for example in Leslie Fiedler. Fiedler merely reverses the genteel values: where the genteel theory requires that poetry say yea to the sublime goodness and beauty of man and the universe, Fiedler requires it speak a No! in thunder.

⁸ Moriarty, Dean Swift, 294.

⁹ Quintana, Swift, 93.

¹⁰ Davis, Jonathan Swift, 164-167.

¹¹ It is worth noting that Ernest Tuveson in his introduction to Swift: a Collection of Critical Essays offers no explanation why he reprinted neither Herbert Davis' "Swift's View of Poetry," nor his "Alecto's Whip." Both these essays are short and general enough to fit the editorial limits Tuveson apparently imposed on himself.

There is now, since 1962, an excellently representative selection of Swift's verse by Padraic Colum; see the Bibliography.

¹² Moriarty, Dean Swift, 294-298.

¹³ A further reason for the continued prevalence of the genteel view of literature is the high social mobility of our culture. Gentilism is still the apparent code of the upper middle class, and people moving up the social scale tend to make of the apparent code of the adopted class their real guide to behavior. Only the insider can know how far the code governs; and all social climbers are by definition outsiders.

¹⁴ See Voigt, Swift and the Twentieth Century, 3-28.

¹⁵ Tuveson, Swift, 2.

¹⁶ Ball, Swift's Verse, viii.

¹⁷ Ehrenpreis' first volume of his biography of Swift does not quite reach the controversial events in Swift's life.

¹⁸ Davis, "Swift's View of Poetry," Jonathan Swift, 163-198.

¹⁹ Davis, "Alecto's Whip," *ibid.*, 249-259.

²⁰ Johnson, The Sin of Wit.

²¹ Ehrenpreis, "Obscenity," The Personality of Jonathan Swift, 29-49.

²² Tyne, "Gulliver's Maker and Gullibility," Criticism, VII, 151-167.

²³ The difference in the ontological axioms embodied in the fictional forms accounts for the difference in the relative positions of the hero, his environment, and the audience that Northrop Frye observes as the characteristics of his five modes of literature. The forms of literature are intended as metaphors or analogues of the world of experience; they offer explanations of the "bloomin' buzzin' confusion" of the world of sense and feeling. Compare Frye, The Educated Imagination.

²⁴ Huxley, Do What You Will, 93.

²⁵ See Ehrenpreis, The Personality of Jonathan Swift, 33; and Davis, Jonathan Swift, 195-196.

²⁶ Huxley, Do What You Will, 93.

²⁷ Davis offers an interesting explanation for Swift's hatred of the word: "Did it ever occur to Mr. Huxley in the first place that the word 'bowels' had been used (in its metaphoric and sentimental sense) throughout the seventeenth century by all the canting preachers whom Swift most detested, till the very sound of it must have been unendurable in his ears?" (Jonathan Swift, 195.)

²⁸ Huxley, Do What You Will, 94.

²⁹ TIME, January 15, 1965, 60-62. "A genius for hatred, alas, inhibits the capacity to love. . . . Author Dennis studies the Travels as a morbid acrostic of Swift's character. In Part IV, for instance, there are striking suggestions that Swift at this period of his life was dangerously schizoid. . . ."

³⁰ Durant, The Story of Civilisation, VIII, "The Age of Louis XIV," 362.

Chapter I

¹ Murry, Orwell, and Lawrence are some of the critics who find the essence of Swift in his obscenity.

² All references following quotations of Swift's poetry are to the appropriate page(s) in Harold Williams' edition of Swift's poems, hereafter cited as Poems.

³ Swift, Tale of a Tub, ed. Guthkelch-Smith, 173.

⁴ See Quintana, "Situational Satire," Swift: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. E. Tuveson, 91-100; Davis, "Literary Satire," Jonathan Swift, 106-125; Voigt, Swift and the Twentieth Century, ch. III.

⁵ Swift, Tale of a Tub, ed. Guthkelch-Smith, 174.

⁶ Quintana, Mind and Art, 51.

⁷ Introduction, 2.

⁸ See Ehrenpreis, The Personality of Jonathan Swift, ch. II.

⁹ Ibid., 39-40.

¹⁰ Orwell, Shooting an Elephant, 81.

¹¹ Murry, Swift, 439.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ I am greatly indebted to Irvin Ehrenpreis in this paragraph. See The Personality of Jonathan Swift, 42.

¹⁴ Ehrenpreis implies that Murry's pity for the whore is misapplied: "There were clergymen in Swift's day whose tenderness towards prostitutes went further than Middleton Murry's. . . it did not amuse Dean Swift." The Personality of Jonathan Swift, 40.

¹⁵ "The Progress of Beauty," Poems 225-229; "Pethox the Great," Poems 323-326; "The Furniture of a Woman's Mind," Poems 415-418.

¹⁶ Ehrenpreis, The Personality of Jonathan Swift, 35 and following.

¹⁷ For identification of the Earl of Romney as the target of the lampoon, see Williams' prefatory matter to the poem, Poems 64.

¹⁸ Ehrenpreis, The Personality of Jonathan Swift, 36.

¹⁹ Poems 82-84.

²⁰ Poems 301-306.

²¹ Ehrenpreis, The Personality of Jonathan Swift, 36.

Chapter II

¹ Swift, Satires and Personal Writings, ed. Eddy, 410.

² Ibid.

³ Francis Bacon, Frances Godwin, Johannes Kepler, and writers of books like theirs, wrote technological fiction, which is a common though not necessary element of science-fiction, and should not be confused with it. Thomas More's Utopia is a piece of proto-science-fiction, but Gulliver's Travels displays all the essential features of the type.

⁴ The real instance is the marriage of Dean Pratt to Philippa, daughter of the 6th Earl of Abercrom. Murry calls her "handsome, aristocratic, and imperious" (Swift, 325). Swift's opinion differs.

⁵ See Davis, Jonathan Swift, 195: "Is it too fantastic to suggest that Strephon and Chloe can be most fairly judged, if it is regarded as a burlesque Epithalamium?"

⁶ Browning, ed., Swift's Poems, xvii.

⁷ Ball, Correspondence, I, 20.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 34-35.

¹⁰ This is only one extreme of interpretation. Dr. Ball (Correspondence, I, 35) quotes Churton Collins, who wrote that Swift "acted in every way honorably and straightforwardly," and "expresses himself in terms of chivalrous devotion." Ball also quotes Jeffreys of the Edinburgh Review, who said the letter exhibited "meanness, selfishness, and brutality. . . in the most violent and hypocritical terms."

¹¹ Eddy, ed., Satires and Personal Writings, 59-72.

¹² Poems 320-322. See Murry, Swift, 326-27. Murry quotes from Swift's letters to Ford (July 22, 1722) and to Cope

himself (May 11, 1723). These letters indicate that Swift's delight in the Copes' household was genuine.

¹³ See also "A Quiet Life and a Good Name," Poems 219-221; and the three epigrams transcribed by Stella, Poems 327-328. Many of Swift's trifles contain disrespectful asides on weak or foolish husbands.

Chapter III

¹ Murry, Swift, 219.

² Poems 219-221.

³ Poems 145-148.

⁴ Orwell, Shooting an Elephant, 81.

⁵ Leslie Stephen, Swift, 205. "Verses to a Lady" is Stephen's title for "An Epistle to a Lady who desired the Author to make Verses on Her in the Heroick Style." (Poems 628-638), whose date fits Stephen's context.

⁶ Davis, "Swift's View of Poetry," Jonathan Swift, 163-198. M. Johnson's Sin of Wit deals mainly with the technique and form, and only incidentally with the theme, imagery, and satiric intent of Swift's poetry.

⁷ Quintana, Mind and Art, Bk. I, ch. IV, contains a thorough and lucid account of Swift's political thought.

⁸ Murry, Swift, 27.

⁹ Colum, The Poems of Jonathan Swift, 126.

¹⁰ See Davis, "Alecto's Whip," Jonathan Swift, 250-251.

¹¹ Poems 295-296, n.

¹² See "Peace and Dunkirk," Poems 167-169.

¹³ Examiner #16 (November 23, 1710).

¹⁴ This essay is easily accessible in Swift: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. E. Tuveson.

¹⁵ Swift did on a few occasions attack avarice as a private vice, for example in the "Elegy on Demar" (Poems 232-235) and "Dicky and Dolly" (Poems 429-31). But in these pieces he contents himself with ridicule, and uses none of the violent irony he expends on Marlborough. (Besides, the "Elegy on Demar" is not wholly his, but a joint composition with his friends in Dublin: Poems 233, n.)

^{15a} "The Calves' Head Club was an association instituted in disrespect for the memory of Charles I. A calf's head formed a prominent part of the meal at annual dinners held on the 30th of January, the date of the King's execution. . . ." Poems 161, n.

¹⁶ I am aware of the topical references to the beheading of Charles II, but these seem to me to be wholly taken up in the metaphor of the satanic service.

¹⁷ See C.S. Lewis, Preface to Paradise Lost, ch. XII-XIV.

¹⁸ Quintana, Mind and Art, 51-74. I am much indebted to Quintana in this paragraph.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Imagery of devilish, or magical, transformation is used elsewhere by Swift, not always with the intent of portraying evil however. See the "Ode addressed to Richard Steele (Hor. Lib. II. Ode I)," Poems 179-184; "Baucis and Philemon," Poems 110-117 & 88-95; "The Midas Fable," Poems 155-158; and others.

²¹ Swift, The Prose Works, vol.

²² Poems 61-64; see also "Upon the Horrid Plot," Poems 297-301; "Imitation of Horace Lib. 2 Sat. 6," Poems 197-202; "The Faggot," Poems 188-190; "Imitation of Horace Book II, Ode I," Poems 179-184; "Ireland," Poems 421-423; and so on.

²³ Murry, Swift, 25-41.

Chapter IV

¹ Davis, Jonathan Swift, 178.

² This practice was restricted to Ireland; Scotland and England had their own mints.

³ Quintana, Mind and Art, 261. This threat of Wood's became the subject of a bizarre arithmetical calculation in the Drapier's fourth Letter (Prose Works, X, 68).

⁴ See, for example, Dr. Johnson's "Life of Swift," Works, XI, 37; Quintana, Mind and Art, 246-272; Davis, Jonathan Swift, 126-142.

⁵ Quintana, Mind and Art, 265-270.

⁶ "Alderman Mark Quin, Whitshed's maternal grandfather, cut his throat in 1674" (Poems 346, n.).

⁷ The Drapier's fourth Letter; Poems 350 and 333.

⁸ Poems 579.

Chapter V

¹ Davis, Jonathan Swift, 63.

² Ibid., 178.

³ Murry, Swift, 81.

⁴ See above, ch. III.

⁵ See Murry, Swift, 25-53, where Murry's conclusions differ from Davis'. Murry argues that Swift's early poems are good evidence that Swift turned to satire not because of an anti-heroic view of poetry, but because he felt heroic poetry was unsuited to the actual moral conditions of his time.

⁶ The most interesting "barren period" is 1693-1698. Murry offers a curious explanation, see Swift, ch. IV; and see also Davis, Jonathan Swift 172-175; Quintana, Mind and Art, 45-48.

⁷ For example, when detained at Holyhead in 1727 on his way to visit Stella in her final illness, Swift passed his time writing a diary and verses, and "put[ting] down hints till I am weary" (Poems 419, nn.). Earlier, in 1714, when he stayed at Letcombe waiting for the inevitable break between Harley and Bolingbroke, he had written one of his bitterest, saddest pieces, containing the only note of self-pity ever found in Swift. See "The Author upon Himself," Poems 191-196.

⁸ Poems 51-55.

⁹ Swift, Journal to Stella, ed. H. Williams, 62 (10 October 1710), and 109 (25 November, 1710).

¹⁰ Quintana, Swift, 73.

¹¹ Meaning is distinct from content.

¹² Morning could also be the first part of the day, but since Swift ends his poem with schoolboys lagging on their way to school, he must intend his description to fit early morning, that is, dawn and immediately after.

¹³ See also "Verses made for Women who cry Apples, etc.," Poems 951-953.

¹⁴ For an example of a less palatable truth couched in a less palatable parody of the pastoral, see "A Pastoral Dialogue," Poems 879-882.

¹⁵ Williams reprints Delany's poem, Poems 266-269.

¹⁶ Poems 82; and above, 32.

¹⁷ Johnson, "Life of Pope," Works, XI, 180.

¹⁸ Tatler #230 (September 26, 1710); reprinted in Eddy, ed., Satires and Personal Writings,

¹⁹ Poems 459, nn.

²⁰ Poems, 461, n.

²¹ Davis, Jonathan Swift, 163.

²² Murry, Swift, ch. III.

²³ This is a more Roman than Greek outlook. On Swift's admiration for the Roman world see Quintana, Mind and Art, Bk. I, ch. II, IV and Bk. II, ch. II. See also Gwynn, The Life and Friendships, 33-44.

²⁴ Davis, Jonathan Swift, 188. See Miller, "The Family in Modern Drama," Atlantic Monthly, vol. 197, #4 (April, 1956), 38: "It is true to say, I think, that the language of the family is the language of private life -- prose. The language of society, the language of public life, is verse."

²⁵ Leavis, "The Irony of Swift," The Common Pursuit, 73-87.

²⁶ Eddy, ed., Satires and Personal Writings, 35-58. This piece may not be Swift's, but its strategy, tone and content are so Swiftian as to persuade me that it is Swift's.

²⁷ Dylan Thomas uses the same trick. See "How to be a Poet," Quite Early One Morning, 194-209.

²⁸ The Shorter OED gives "a literary work of miscellaneous or disconnected pieces; a composition of no fixed form or plan" with the date 1764 as one of the meanings of "rhapsody." The date is too late, for Swift is clearly punning on this sense of the word and the present common one of "effusion marked by extravagance of idea. . . or sentiment."

²⁹ Dr. Johnson in Rasselas lets Imlac claim supremacy for the poet; but Rasselas is a deliberately ambiguous work, and I hesitate to identify Johnson's beliefs with any one of the opinions put forward in the story.

³⁰ Swift, Tale of a Tub, ed. Guthkelch-Smith, 93-95.

³¹ Lest I be accused of fanciful interpretation, I must admit that the connection between Grub-Street and the insect image is a subliminal connection. But so neatly does Swift modulate from fleas biting fleas to poets railing on poets, and from thence to pity for Grub-Street, that I am sure he was aware of the connection and exploited it.

³² Eddy, ed., Satires and Personal Writings, 37.

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